

PACT Manual

Developed during the WP3 **Online prevention** activities of the project titled

“The social inclusion of LGBT people. Public attitudes and evidence-based interventions
to increase their quality of life”

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Translation into English:

Andreea Isbășoiu – chapters 1 & 6

Alexandra Meszaros – chapters 2 & 3

Bogdan Tulbure – chapters 4 & 5

Developed by:

Bogdan Tulbure

Andreea Isbășoiu

Special thanks to:

Andre Rădulescu

Lavinia Chirică

Project coordinator

Partner 1

MODULE 1 - GENERAL PRESENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME (The Acceptance Process)

„Your life is a journey. It is about change, development, discovery, evolution, transformation; it means continually expanding the vision of what is possible; it's about shaping the soul, about learning to see clearly and deeply, to listen to your intuition, to courageously accept challenges at every existential stage. Now you are exactly where you need to be, on your path. And from where you are, you can only go forward, shape your life within the parameters of a story of victory, healing, courage, beauty, intelligence, strength, dignity and love.” (Caroline Adams)

Objectives of the first module:

- To be aware of the sources of minority stress that you are confronting;
- To familiarize yourself with the specifics of the PACT Prevention Program and see what the benefits of a new approach to stress, fear, worry and anxiety could be;
- To review theoretical aspects that will help you as you go through future modules;
- To acquire basic skills necessary to live the meaningful life you deserve.

If you are interested in the differences between terms such as Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation, you can consult the following Terms Glossary.

The LGBTQ+ Terms Glossary

Sex refers to a complex of biological traits (genotypic and phenotypic) of an individual which enroll into the categories of masculine, feminine or intersex (an atypical combination of traits that usually distinguish men from women). Among the indicators of biological sex, we can mention sex chromosomes, gonads, internal and external reproductive organs.

Gender refers to the attitudes, emotions, and behaviors that are culturally associated with a person's biological sex. Therefore, gender is a social construct, based on a set of emotional, behavioral and cultural characteristics that society "attacks" to a person's biological sex.

Gender identity refers to the deeply psychological experience and individually awareness of gender, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth. Most people have a male or female gender identity, but some people don't fit neatly into one of these two categories. When gender identity is incongruent with biological sex, the individual may identify with the term transgender or trans (see below).

Gender roles represent a set of behavioral and social norms and expectations that are considered to be appropriate for a person of a particular gender in the context of a specific culture. These norms and expectations are culturally shaped, and they are subject to change and transformation throughout history.

Gender expression is the way people express their gender identity and are recognized by others as having a particular gender. The expression of gender often refers to some visible features (clothes, hairstyle, gestures, manners, etc.), which are attributed to a certain gender in society. The connection between physical traits and gender often

depends on the social, historical and cultural context of the society, and is traditionally expressed in terms of "masculine" or "feminine". But the gender expression may not always correspond to the gender identity of a person (felt internally and psychologically), who either does not want or cannot express their gender identity, including for reasons of personal safety.

Gender dysphoria is a term used by specialists to talk about the acute and persistent feeling of mismatch between the sex assigned at birth and the gender to which the person feels belonging. Gender dysphoria and nonconformity with gender norms are not the same thing: nonconformity with gender norms has no clinical implications, whereas dysphoria produces distress and can lead to dysfunction.

Gender euphoria is the opposite of dysphoria, and represents the deep sense of authenticity, well-being, fulfillment that transpeople feel when they have experiences that affirm their gender identity, or when they take steps to live in accordance with their identity. For some people, gender euphoria is the feeling that makes them realize they are transgender.

Gender-fluid, genderqueer, bigender, agender or non-binary person refers to people who do not identify as male or female but identify somewhere outside of these terms or make a combination of them. Some non-binary people choose to use neutral language (eg pronouns). In the Romanian language, apart from the possessive pronoun her/his, there is no neutral pronoun for addressing these people, but in the English language the address with "they/them" can be used.

Transgender (Trans) is an umbrella term that includes people who have a gender identity different from the sex they were assigned at birth. It refers to those people who feel, prefer or choose, through language, terms of address, clothing, make-up or body modifications,

to present themselves differently from the expectations of their birth gender. It includes both people who have medically or legally transitioned, as well as people who identify as transgender but do not make any transition.

Transition includes the actions related to the social, medical, or legal transition, which lead to the recognition of the person's gender identity by society.

Cisgender (Cis) refers to a person whose gender identity corresponds to the sex assigned at birth.

Sexual orientation refers to the gender of those to whom a person is sexually and romantically attracted. Sexual orientation includes three possible categories: a) attraction to members of one's own sex (homosexual or lesbian), b) attraction to members of the other sex (heterosexual), and c) attraction to members of both sexes (bisexual). Sexual orientation and gender identity should not be confused, as transgender people can be straight, lesbian, gay or bisexual.

A **lesbian** is a woman who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to other women. **Gay** a person who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of the same gender. It traditionally refers to men, but other people who are attracted to the same gender may also define themselves as gay.

A **bisexual** person is a person who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to people of different genders.

Sources:

American Psychological Association (2012). Guidelines for psychological practice with lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. *Am Psychol.*, 67(1):10-42. 10.1037/a0024659 ACCEPT association. (2020, November 18). *Trans in Romania*. <https://transinromania.ro>

The Minority Stress

Normally, every person (regardless of sexual orientation or privately assumed gender identity) faces a number of sources of stress in everyday life. In fact, stress is a part of everyone's life and, in normal amounts, motivates us to cope with demands. Unlike heterosexual cisgender people, gay and/or transgender people are additionally subjects to what specialists have called minority stress. This means that in addition to the usual sources of stress, LGBTQ+ people face an additional set of stressors that came from being a sexual minority. In the following, we will refer to gay men, lesbians, and bisexual people [LGB people, for short], but we understand that some of you identify with other labels, or reject labels altogether. The present intervention is mainly (but not exclusively) addressed to people who have faced additional difficulties due to the fact that society does not accept their romantic or sexual attractions.

In a predominantly straight society, navigating life for LGB people requires additional skills. Scientific studies have shown that the superimposition of minority stress on top of the other usual demands of everyday life, plays an important role in the psychological health of the LGBTQ+ community. This is also the reason why we invited you to go through this program, with the aim of identifying the sources of stress and anxiety in your life and looking for appropriate answers to prevent the emergence of more serious clinical problems in the future. Before moving on to the concrete step of talking about some of the most common sources of minority stress, it would be important to understand that higher levels of anxiety and depression among LGB people represent a normal response to the special challenges they face. In other words, the fact that someone encounters more psychological and social obstacles and has to manage a larger and more complex amount of problems, can have an important effect on inner resources and can generate normal reactions of fear or discouragement. What we mean is that minority stress is a common reaction to the additional obstacles that are thrown in the way of any minority group (sexual, religious, ethnic, or otherwise).

After this brief introduction, we propose you take an important first step in managing stress. It's about seeing concretely what the most important sources of minority stress are, that LGB people face. The reason we want to do this is simple: to succeed in solving any problem, it is necessary to first identify it concretely (not just vaguely name it or just complain about its presence). Therefore, we suggest that you carefully read the list of the most important sources of stress and mark with a "YES", the sources of stress that you feel the strongest. It is possible that, since the categories of sources of stress that we have listed are more general, you will find yourself partially in one category or in another. If you find yourself partially in a category, you can mark it with "YES" and discuss the details with the psychologist you work with. The main purpose of this exercise is simply to become aware of the main sources of stress you are facing.

The daily stress experienced by minorities	Yes	In a way	No
<i>Cognitive:</i> insecurity, self-awareness.			
<i>Affective:</i> fear of rejection and victimization; fear of being judged or "discovered"; hypervigilance; the sadness given by the lack of rights; internalizing emotional reactions to discrimination (internalized homophobia).			
<i>Interpersonal:</i> rejection from the social and religious community; the stereotypes, the idea that homosexuals, lesbians and bisexuals have HIV, that they are sinners, against religious; avoiding "hetero" events.			
Stress related to friends/colleagues	Yes	In a way	No
<i>Cognitive:</i> the feeling of "pariah"; mistrust of new people; devaluation due to constant rejections; obsessive concern with what others think of them.			
<i>Affective:</i> stress due to self-disclosure or concealment; loneliness; the feeling of shame caused by early rejection.			
<i>Interpersonal:</i> social isolation; hiding the real self, living a double life/theatre; alienation from friends because of the "risk" of opening up; the early feeling that you are different; bullying/harassment.			
The stress of the romantic relationship	Yes	In a way	No
<i>Cognitive:</i> the fear of not ending up alone; the pressure to lead a hetero-normative life; the pressure of being in a relationship; being bisexual and not knowing whether to form a couple with a woman or a man.			

<i>Affective:</i> the perception of a growing threat in relationships; fear of contracting HIV; difficulty identifying and communicating emotions; sexual feelings for men that are perceived as dangerous/shameful; the resentment of being alone; concern for public display of affection towards the partner.			
<i>Interpersonal:</i> avoiding romantic intimacy; suppression of romantic feelings; difficulties communicating HIV status; engaging in casual sex without lasting intimacy; sexual relations with friends; lack of assertiveness in intimate relationships.			
Stress related to family of origin and development	Yes	In a way	No
<i>Cognitive:</i> perceived lack of control in adolescence, negative family perspective on sexual orientation.			
<i>Affective:</i> sadness caused by non-acceptance from family of origin.			
<i>Interpersonal:</i> feeling like you've let your parents down; lack of parental acceptance; inconsistency between gender identity and the sex assigned at birth, bullying and nonacceptance from the family around the holidays; the lack of models for a fulfilling life as a homosexual, lesbian or bisexual.			
The stress of the LGBT+ community	Yes	In a way	No
<i>Cognitive:</i> not being gay/lesbian enough; the pressure to have a very good financial status, age discrimination; trying to integrate into the community through substance use; rigid body standards; concerns regarding body shape (eg: penis size, breast size); focus on attractiveness.			
<i>Affective:</i> escaping through the use of substances; guilt after engaging in pleasurable/hedonistic activities; using sex as a way to reduce stress.			
<i>Interpersonal:</i> pressure to belong to a subgroup of the LGBT+ community (ex: bears); fear of being labeled as bisexual; emphasis on sex/hooking up; acceptance of substance use; community norms that discourage long-term relationship formation; lies about relationship status or HIV.			
Work discrimination	Yes	In a way	No
<i>Cognitive:</i> concerns about bringing partner to work events.			
<i>Interpersonal:</i> the impression that you are the LGBTQ+ representative at work; hiding achievements related to sexuality/sexual orientation from the CV.			

Program Benefits

Before you begin the actual program, you need to know that you have the power to choose, but it's also important to be aware that fear, worry and anxiety are not of your own choosing. They simply happen. They are not a choice. No one chooses to be anxious or fearful. But you can certainly choose to approach anxiety differently, which can have beneficial effects on your life. In this program you will be able to learn to approach problems from a different perspective.

You will find out that this program can help you relate to anxiety and your life in general in a different way. The program was designed to encourage you to control the controllable. In other words, you can control and change how you react - when you have anxiety-related feelings, thoughts, or worries:

- You can learn to "let go" of worries, anxieties, fears and simply experience them as they are - painful thoughts, sensations, emotions, or memories.
- You don't need to act upon your anxiety, you don't need to drive your actions. As much as you may feel the need to run away from intense anxiety, you can do the opposite. You can learn to "watch" anxious feelings and anxious thoughts and "not do" what they dictate.
- You can learn to be kinder to yourself and to your emotional life, instead of treating anxiety as an enemy or an unwelcome guest.
- You can learn to live with the discomfort of anxiety and direct your energy toward important things.

From research, but also from clinical experience, we know that struggling more and more with anxiety, worry and fear is not a solution. It's not about trying to get rid of them. It's also not about replacing negative thoughts with positive ones, like replacing a worn spark plug in a car. None of this really works when it comes to anxiety and fear.

And yet, many people do struggle in this fight, probably you too

Like us, you know this battle firsthand. You may think that you will be victorious if you increase your struggle and trials, if you learn more effective strategies, if you read

more about anxiety problems or if you change your medication, etc. But here is the harsh truth: no one can win in such a battle. This probably makes you feel discouraged and hopeless. But we also have good news: to live the life we want; we don't have to be victorious in this battle. As you actively go through the modules, you will discover the reasons for this seemingly paradoxical truth.

For now, you might just accept the idea that the solution to your stress and anxiety problems isn't a battle between good and evil. The solution is to change your relationship with your anxious thoughts and emotions and how you react to them. How can you do this? Learning to recognize anxious thoughts and feelings without merging with them, without acting upon them.

The main benefit of this program is that you will start doing things that matter, instead of wasting precious energy and time, which is unfortunately limited for us on this earth. Remember this throughout your study. The "grand prize" is a life truly lived or lived to the fullest!

Theoretical Clarifications

This program offers you a different approach, based on a revolutionary therapy called Acceptance and Commitment Therapy or ACT for short.

This new therapy is based on 6 central processes, which will be briefly described below:

1. **Acceptance** is the viable alternative to avoidance. Acceptance involves consciously and actively embracing life events without trying to change their frequency or form, especially in situations where they can create distress. A person who suffers will learn not to fight the suffering, but to let the pain pass; a person with strong fears will learn to live them without resisting them. Acceptance is not a purpose in itself, but a method that supports the other processes through which you will learn to put your life on the desired direction.

2. **Detachment** involves a series of techniques through which you will learn to reduce the negative impact of some thoughts, images and emotions, without changing their content. You will train yourself to "see" non-judgmentally: thoughts, emotions and images, for what they are, instead of viewing the world through them. You will curiously and gently observe how your mind works and consciously explore it without merging with its contents. Through detachment, the thoughts will calibrate, return to normal dimensions and their negative effect will be lessened.

3. **Being present** in the here and now involves connecting directly to current life events without judging or evaluating them. This process is based on attention, which moves from one aspect to another in the order in which they occur. The words should be used to describe the sequence of events, not the interpretations, and this leads to the development of a better control over behavior. You will learn to notice the moments when you are no longer anchored in the present and bring your attention back to the things that matter.

4. **The self** is viewed as a context in which a person's life unfolds, a broad perspective from which a person experiences internal and external events. The self is seen primarily as an observer and is not marked by all that happens. It does not merge with events, but

constitutes itself in a wider framework of observing things and flexibly integrating them into the person's existence.

5. **Values** represent existential coordinates that are gradually assimilated in a person's life and that provide directions in the profession, in family life, in relationships with peers, in the relationship with oneself. This therapy uses a wide range of exercises to help you choose real values, stemming from personal choices.

6. **Commitment** is the central component of change. If you're ready to commit to learning, you're one step closer to a truly worthwhile life. If you are not ready, please stop and ask yourself: "What stays in my way?". To see the barriers, first look inside your being, then outside. It's time to decide if you will allow these obstacles to stand in your way. If you've decided to go down this path, then you should do it repeatedly, with each module separately, as often as needed.

Commitment doesn't mean you'll do everything right from now on and never go back to your old ways. It means you will do everything in your power to get where you want to go. And breaking your commitment doesn't mean you've failed, or worse, that you're the failure yourself. Take a break, it's just your mind playing tricks on you. We are human and it is human to err. If you break the pledge, it's like falling off your bike. That's when you get up and you can choose to get back on the bike, continuing on the path you've taken and learning from your mistakes.

It is perfectly normal to feel intimidated or helpless and even scared in the face of minority stressors. This is how our minds work. Maybe you even think that it is too complicated to succeed in becoming a mature and balanced person. Put these thoughts in their place and continue to go through the program. Thoughts come, accompany us for a while and then leave.

Why ACT?

From the beginning we suggest you try this program because we know you can learn to emerge victorious without fighting your fears. During the program you may find out that efforts to fight stress and anxiety or to control your thoughts and emotions have large costs because they create discomfort and reduce your quality of life. Our paradoxical suggestion is to stop trying to manage stress and anxiety. Seek to change your relationship with the thoughts and feelings that cause you discomfort and seek to act differently when they arise, but do not fight them.

This will open up new possibilities for you, you will have energy for really important things. ACT is about allowing yourself to feel the pain, without stopping you from doing really important things for your own life. It's about acceptance and change at the same time.

EXERCISE 1.1. LIFE AS A BOOK

The purpose of the exercise: to gain the clarity you need to commit to a new path

1. *Take a break and gently close your eyes. Become aware of your breath, of this moment, of the now. Anchor yourself in the present and allow yourself to stay in the present. When you are ready, open your eyes and go with the exercise further.*

2. *Hold your hands in front of you, palms up, and imagine that you are holding a book in them, "The Book of Your Life." It's a book you know too well. You look at the book and notice that several pages are written. It is your life, from the moment you were born until now. You see important and less important moments, joys and maybe a lot of hardship and pain. See also all the struggles with fear and anxiety. You know very well the story in these pages.*

3. *Flip through the book and see that the story ends abruptly. Open a new page, on which nothing is written, only the title of the chapter: "Tomorrow". You may think it's strange not to see anything for tomorrow, but in fact, it's just as it should be. Tomorrow is unwritten, you have to see it as a lot of possibilities, experiences and journeys. Take a moment to absorb this truth. Then continue. 4. Now ask yourself, "What would I like written on this blank page about me and my life? Do I want this new chapter to be a repetition of the days, weeks, months that have passed, or do I want to write something different?" If you were to write on this blank page, what would you like to write?*

We invite you to write down what you would like to write next in the "Book of Your Life".

Here you have Michael's example:

We invite you to write down what you would like to write next in the "Book of Your Life".

Although I would like to complete my goals tomorrow, I would most like to have a new approach of my tomorrow day. Since beginning this program, I started to notice certain dysfunctional things: I put pressure on myself, wanting to do too much in a day, something that worries me from the morning and finally causes me to be afraid to start my long to-do list. But tomorrow I would like to understand that I am a human, not a robot. To take things step by step, and from my list, if I don't feel like doing a specific thing, to proactively choose something else to do, and come back to that thing later. Finishing another task will still make me feel satisfied. And perhaps the most important thing is to be understanding with myself: to understand that it's okay that I didn't get to do everything proposed: academic, administrative, sports and personal, while doing other desired activities at the moment: walking, a coffee with a friend. Practically, to reduce my major feelings of guilt, in the evening before going to bed, and to have a more positive approach, to reduce the stress generated by professional deadlines, projects, preparing for vacation, etc.

Last but not least, when I drink my coffee tomorrow, I would like to have a more positive attitude and realize that, of all the possible activities, I cannot do them all. It is certain that I want to go to the gym, but instead of proposing to finish the report for the project that is ending and look for resources for the next one, I will insist on only one of them (probably finishing the project because it is the most important task and more difficult). Then, I will go to help my grandmother, but I won't visit my aunt anymore. I'm going to cook Asian food at a friend's house, but I won't watch the series either. Later in the evening, after I have done some more work, I will either read from a personal development book, or I will do some German language exercises.

This is when commitment comes in. You have to be very specific and aware of what you want. Think about the possibilities, but also about what you can do on your own. Think of a few words or sentences about how you want your life to turn out. It can be something extremely simple, like, "I want to spend 15 minutes a day going through this program."

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FEAR AND ANXIETY

Although you may feel overwhelmingly alone, as if no one could understand what you're going through, you'd be amazed to discover that there are many people with anxiety: they live in the country, in the city, they're rich, they're poor, they're different ethnicities and ages, or different religions. Anxiety is not fun. Imagine if one day all people who suffer from anxiety decided to wear a red cap. It would be very difficult to move around the city without catching a glimpse of a red cap.

The more you learn, the more certain you will be that there is hope and that you are not alone! All people are born with the ability to experience fear and anxiety. You've probably already noticed this and know something about it. If you are working with this material, you have probably experienced many emotions of fear and anxiety.

Next, we will give you a new perspective on anxiety and fear. How can you differentiate fear from anxiety? Here are some things that will help you.

Fear – present-oriented emotion

Fear involves intense alarming of the body. It is triggered instantly and comes as a natural response when we perceive a threat from the surrounding world. Fear is a useful emotion. We need fear to protect ourselves when our safety or health is threatened.

How do we know we are afraid? Our heart beats fast, we get short of breath, our blood pressure rises, we feel like we are suffocating, we suddenly get hot, we feel nauseous, dizzy or sweaty. Some people even feel like passing out. The body and brain are exposed to a lot of effort, a bunch of systems are activated and adrenaline is released. These changes are necessary to be able to make the flight or fight decision. Fear

sharpens our senses and helps us focus our attention to face danger and protect ourselves.

Anxiety – future-oriented emotion

Unlike fear, anxiety is a future-oriented emotion. This means you are anxious about something that hasn't happened yet. It can be the result of tests that have not yet arrived, an upcoming trip, an upcoming exam, or a job interview. Any aspect of your future can be the target of anxiety. As we said, anxiety doesn't do fads. When you experience anxiety, you may feel fear, pressure, worry, muscle tension. You may notice that the bodily changes associated with anxiety are much stronger than those associated with fear (from the example above). You may feel like you've reached your limit. Anxiety lasts longer than fear, is much more pronounced and dramatic. It can come back repeatedly for days, weeks, months or even years. This is possible because, unlike fear, anxiety is fueled by threats produced by your mind rather than real ones.

As hard as it is for you to deal with anxiety, it is important to be aware that you greatly need the ability to experience anxiety. Why? Because it motivates you to act in a way that is safe and right for you.

Fear and anxiety can help. Fear triggers powerful defense mechanisms and anxiety and worry about the future can motivate us to make viable, common-sense plans to prepare for potential dangers to our health, safety or family well-being.

You're probably wondering how your experiences match up with what you've read so far. Therefore, we will do a simple and effective exercise. You will need to think of a recent situation in which you were extremely afraid, and it was very good that you lived through fear because you were able to save yourself or someone else from real danger.

EXERCISE 1.2. CAN MY FEAR AND ANXIETY BE HELPFUL?
Exercise purpose: Awareness that fear and anxiety can be helpful
<i>Write on the lines below, briefly and clearly, the answers to the following questions:</i>
<i>1. What was the threatening/dangerous event?</i>
<i>2. How did you react (what did you think, what did you feel, what did you do)?</i>
<i>3. How helpful was the way you acted?</i>
<i>4. What was a possible problem you were concerned about?</i>

Here you have George's example:

EXERCISE 1.2. CAN MY FEAR AND ANXIETY BE HELPFUL?
Exercise purpose: Awareness that fear and anxiety can be helpful
<i>Write on the lines below, briefly and clearly, the answers to the following questions:</i>
1. What was the threatening/dangerous event?
<i>I arrived at the hospital after staying at home for a week feeling extremely sick. After two days of hospitalization, my condition worsened, I could no longer walk more than 50m. I was transferred 4 times in 2 weeks, the doctors didn't know what to do with me and the tests didn't look good at all (effects on the liver, not treated in time).</i>
2. How did you react (what did you think, what did you feel, what did you do)?
<i>Initially, I thought it would pass in due time, having a quick recovery. But as I kept getting bad news, my fear grew more and more. And the worst thing was that I was terribly alone, there was no one in the salon and I couldn't even receive visitors. The only strategy was to talk on the phone with friends, but also when I was in a better mood and managed to disconnect from the virtual world (about 12 hours of series!!!)</i>
3. How helpful was the way you acted?
<i>It wasn't very helpful. Unfortunately, after I noticed what was happening to me I started to worry. Until I recovered I could not calm down.</i>
4. What was a possible problem you were concerned about?
<i>Initially, my concern was that the treatments would become more and more difficult to bear and my condition would get worse. For a week I had to stay in bed tied for 8 hours, because I had an automatic injection, something that created a total fear for me every time the salon door opened.</i>

Here's something worth remembering: We need to experience worry, anxiety, fear, just like we need air, water, and food.

It does not mean that it is useful to be anxious all the time. Fear, anxiety, and worry can do more harm than good, especially if they occur too often or are too intense. Sometimes they appear when you are feeling safe and they become annoying and almost impossible to stop; they stand between you and the life you want and deserve. In fact, the difference between the absence or the presence of an anxiety disorder is given by the extent to which fear, anxiety and worry negatively affect your life.

AVOIDANCE IS NOT A WAY OF LIFE

By repeatedly avoiding the things in your life that cause you fear and anxiety, you will end up turning your back on life in general, living in a narrow space occupied by worry and fighting worry, fear and anxiety. To be able to enjoy and to embrace the positive events in your life, you must also embrace the negative ones: emotional and psychological suffering. Unfortunately, there is no other way to live life to the fullest.

1.3. CENTERING EXERCISE: RETURN TO YOUR OWN BREATH

Exercise purpose: to learn to be present in your life when fear, anxiety and worries try to take over

Sit in a comfortable position on the chair. Sit with both feet on the floor. Place one hand on your chest, above your ribs and the other on your stomach, above your navel. Close your eyes slowly. Take a few breaths, gently: breathe in... breathe out... Become aware of the sound of your breath as you breathe in and as you breathe out. Next, focus your attention on your hands and simply notice and feel their movement, how they rise and fall with each inhalation and exhalation. That's all to do, nothing more. Be aware and watch them. Perhaps at some point you will feel distracted by all kinds of thoughts; it's okay, realize you've been distracted and focus again on your breathing and hands movement. You can be distracted by the sounds around you. Do the same. Become aware of them, then turn your attention to your breath and hands. Do the same if your attention turns to emotions or physiological sensations. Towards the end of the exercise, let all thoughts go and focus on the sounds around you. While doing this, take three deep breaths. Fill your lungs with air, hold your breath for a moment, then exhale slowly. Repeat this two or three times, then open your eyes slightly and remain aware of your breathing.

Please write down some impressions of the centering exercise.

Michael's answer:

It was somehow beneficial to have no other thoughts about anything. I felt so "airy" as if all that air went directly to the brain. I didn't expect it to work so well. I will repeat this, even outside the program in moments of fatigue. I feel like it's a way to "restart".

There is hope if you give up fighting and avoiding. Avoiding and fighting doesn't work. This truth can free you from your fruitless efforts. Here is also a metaphor, which will make it easier for you to accept these ideas:

The poison ivy and the effect of scratching

The poison ivy is a plant that produces strong skin irritation. Many people avoid the plant in order not to choose the terrible sensation. If you have had contact with this plant, then you know how it is: the need to scratch takes control. But if you scratch, things get worse, and you'll end up with open sores that can spread all over your body. Scratching brings temporary relief, but healing requires giving up scratching.

Anxiety is like poison ivy, which cannot be avoided. Like ivy, it creates strong discomfort and an acute need for relief. And if you fight it and/or avoid it, it's just like scratching. In the short term it calms you down, but in the long-term anxiety increases and spreads into all aspects of life, taking control and making you move away from what is important to you.

People who deal with anxiety are among the strongest, but they are usually very hard on themselves. They have the impression that they are not good enough, that they are not trying hard enough and very often self-evaluate themselves negatively. But actually, fighting anxiety is from the start doomed to failure. So, a more viable alternative strategy is to stop running away from anxiety, stop fighting it! Instead, you could try going through the exercises in this program, even though some of them may seem bizarre or even silly. You don't have to believe everything or understand everything from the first module.

You have probably already been visited by some discouraging thoughts. Thank your mind for the thoughts and then move on. Don't try to convince yourself about anything and don't fight with your mind. Just keep an open mind, go through the material and practice it. This is the key!

MYTHS ABOUT ANXIETY AND ITS DISORDERS

It seems like every day we learn something new about anxiety. This program has hundreds of scientific studies behind it. Each of these explored what turns anxiety and fear into such difficult problems, and more importantly, what can you do about them. Let's take a look at the myths circulating in all news channels and see how true they are.

Myth 1: Anxiety problems are biological and hereditary.

"Mom/Dad had anxiety too and I'm just like her/him." "The doctor told me that I have to take pills. That's the only way I'll get by." Yes, it is true that anxiety can run in families, but not exclusively due to genetic causes, but mostly because we have learned certain behaviors. Of course, certain predispositions can be inherited (e.g.: getting angry quickly, being introverted, intelligent, muscular, athletic, etc.). We can inherit a predisposition towards anxiety, but not an anxiety problem and this has been scientifically proven. Genetic predisposition creates an environment in which we can choose what to develop and what to change.

Myth 2: Intense anxiety is abnormal.

People who experience anxiety usually seek help because their thoughts and emotions are causing them discomfort. Anxiety and fear seem overwhelming, far too much to bear, thoughts and worries are paralyzing and almost impossible to stop. In short, everything is too intense. It is true that intense anxiety is the basis of anxiety disorders. But it is also true that intense anxiety is not a disorder in itself.

Myth 3: Anxiety is a sign of weakness.

Anxiety is not in any way a sign of weakness, illness, flawed personality, weak character, laziness or lack of motivation. Suffering is a vital part of the human condition and anyone can be derailed by emotional pain. All people suffer!

Myth 4: Anxiety can and should be managed.

Of all the myths, this one has the most devastating effects. That is why module 2 is dedicated to him. This myth is fueled by social expectations and rules, which define a life well lived as a life without physical and emotional pain. The present message is that

"for a better life you must first think positive and feel positive." Managing anxiety and avoiding it will give you security in the short term, but in the long term it will narrow your life, limiting you to only doing those things that seem safe for you.

Next we propose an exercise that will reveal what happens when we try hard to suppress, manage and change our thoughts and feelings.

EXERCISE 1.4. DON'T THINK ABOUT THE PINK ELEPHANT!
Purpose: We see what happens when we try to suppress our thoughts
<i>Sit in a comfortable position. Now that you're ready, close your eyes and say to yourself: "Don't think about a pink elephant!" Try as hard as you can for a few minutes. Only after you open your eyes, read the passage below.</i>
You are invited to write your opinion about this exercise:
<i>Michael's answer:</i> <i>Of course I thought of a pink elephant! The more I tried not to think, the more different elephants appeared, but also different shades of pink. I couldn't suppress my thoughts!</i>

Like most people, you probably find this exercise particularly difficult or even impossible. Even if you have tried all kind of strategies, they have failed, because the human mind is programmed to surface learned things, automatisms: "don't think about a pink elephant" is actually a thought about the pink elephant. This exercise teaches us that the effort to avoid a thought or a feeling, fuels that thought or feeling and in the long time, intensifies it. So, the time spent trying to control fears, anxieties and worries is from the start a waste of energy and a distraction from the important things. But if you do it, it's important not to blame yourself. Anyone can be caught in this trap. Too many people try to get unwanted thoughts out of their heads. And the more they try, the more violently the thoughts return. The point is that you can learn to live better, without just thinking positive

or just feeling comfortable. This is the beginning of change. And don't forget the breathing exercises. These are very powerful, because they can create an open and gentle environment where anxiety cannot grow. Anxiety needs negative energy and your active participation to develop it.

BY GIVING UP ON THESE MYTHS, NEW OPPORTUNITIES CAN OPEN

Let yourself be carried away by reading this material and do all the exercises in your own rhythm. Stop waiting for something miraculous to happen to feel better. The solution is in your hands. Accept your thoughts and feelings, whatever they may be about, commit to going through all the materials and take action. Drop the myths about anxiety and you will see how everything will begin to change.

Don't get caught in the trap of the mind!

Every person is born with the ability to merge with his thoughts, to let himself be carried away by their "entanglement". When we do this, the thoughts gain power and we create scenarios where we feel as if the things we are thinking about are actually happening.

Words are just words, even if they are scary. Thoughts are just thoughts and images are just images, but they can turn into threatening monsters if we let them. Every human has good and bad thoughts and feelings. They come, stay with us for a while, then leave us. Don't give them more importance than they deserve. Don't feed your fears, anxiety and worry with negative evaluations, because they will grow and take hold of you.

The mind "invites" us to judge everything constantly. It is easier for us to form judgments when we have certain benchmarks: good / bad, right / wrong, happy / sad.

Going through life, we have a lot of experiences, which we evaluate and label as good, bad, sad, heart-wrenching, etc. It is normal to interpret them, as long as we realize that what we are doing is an interpretation given by our mind and not reality itself. You may not have the power to control your negative judgments right now, but you can choose

to keep feeding them or not. This program also addresses your relationship with yourself, encouraging you to treat yourself with love and compassion.

Here is a story, which will reveal the meaning of those addressed above:

Who are you feeding?

A wise man was talking to his nephew about his emotions. He told him: "I feel like I have two wolves in my soul, two wolves fighting: one is vengeful, violent and angry, and the other is loving and compassionate." "And which of them will win the fight?" the nephew asked him. "The one I feed more" replied the grandfather.

Read the example below and then complete the following table with at least three examples of your own.

EXERCISE 1.5. WHO ARE YOU FEEDING? Marian's example	
Exercise purpose: to learn to see things as they really are	
<i>EXPERIENCE AS IT IS (viewed with compassion and love)</i>	<i>JUDGMENT ON EXPERIENCE (the given interpretation)</i>
<i>I am unable to follow through on anything. It is too late.</i>	<i>I will do nothing in life. I'll just waste time not getting where I want.</i>
<i>I will never be able to love myself enough. So noone will be able to love me the way I want.</i>	<i>I will be a battered person in life. I won't get any results.</i>

EXERCISE 1.5. WHO ARE YOU FEEDING?	
Exercise purpose: to learn to see things as they really are	
<i>EXPERIENCE AS IT IS (viewed with compassion and love)</i>	<i>JUDGMENT ON EXPERIENCE (the given interpretation)</i>

Now is the time to reflect. How is it easier for you: to see things as life events or to interpret/judge them negatively? When you engage in negative interpretations, you are left with only one option: to escape and to avoid similar experiences. And you have already seen that avoidance is not a solution. Obsessive thoughts work in the same way: we have the impression that our fears will come true if we don't do something to prevent the disaster (eg: If I don't disinfect my hands now, I'll get sick). As a result, we begin to frantically wash and disinfect our hands (compulsion) to escape the anticipated consequences (obsession). And so, we fell into the trap of our own mind, feeding the anxiety over and over again. Which wolf do you choose to feed?

OBSERVING LIFE EXPERIENCES

One of the bravest reactions you can have when experiencing any emotion (eg fear, worry, anxiety) is to not do what it tells you to do. Such a reaction is courageous precisely because the impulse to flee, to defend, to break is so strong and it intervenes automatically. The hard way, but the right way, is to do nothing about them. The ability to do nothing is the key and comes with practice. Sometimes you may feel that your mind is "screaming" at you to react the way you have been doing before. In time, through much practice, you will learn to "see" your own thoughts as simple thoughts, to be aware of them, but without being a slave of them. Finally, we propose some exercises in this regard:

EXERCISE 1.6. OBSERVE YOUR THOUGHTS!

Exercise purpose: creating a non-evaluative framework for perceiving events

Sit comfortably in a place where you will not be disturbed for 10 minutes. Slowly close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Keep this way of breathing throughout the exercise. Now imagine that your mind is a white room with two doors. Thoughts enter through the front door and leave the room through the back door. Now watch a thought enter. Just notice it, without analyzing it, without considering it true or false, without trying to remove it. And above all, don't start judging. Just breathe and follow that thought. You can see it's just a thought and it can't affect you, you're the same person. It's time to let the thought out of the "room". Continue the exercise until you emotionally distance yourself from the troubling thoughts. Even judgments can pass through the "white room" without you having to do anything. Practice this exercise at least once a day.

Note down some relevant things related to this exercise.

Michael's answer:

Initially, I started with thoughts related to this day. I let pass through the room all my thoughts related to what I will do today, which presents particular difficulties, They entered and left the room. Then, out of pure curiosity, I wanted to try themes related to the future. Here the experience was a little different, because even their simple mention, caused them to stagnate in the room. But I didn't want to judge and develop them, I said "let them pass, whatever obstacles might appear, it's not like these situations will actually happen". Maybe it needs more exercises on my part. The exercise works and I am convinced that in the long term I will be able to better observe my predominantly anxious thoughts.

Physical movement is healthy in every way. Next we recommend a movement exercise, through which you can train your ability to observe your own thoughts and emotions.

EXERCISE 1.7. TAKE YOUR MIND FOR A WALK!

Exercise purpose: to observe thoughts and emotions, to act "with" them and not "driven by them"

Take your mind and body for a walk, literally, for 15 minutes outdoors without listening to music. As you walk, you will notice that your legs and body know how to move, automatically, without you having to think about the actual walking, as if you were operating on autopilot. It's time to do something interesting that you've probably never done before:

on the breath (as you learned in the centering exercise at the beginning of the module);

normally and watch the rhythm of your steps and the way your body moves;

mind starts to "wander", just notice it; then focus your attention on walking again;

how it feels when each foot lands on the ground; then focus on your hips: how does it feel the walk level? Then move your attention to the bust and feel the movement there;

how all parts of the body have different movements, feel different, but are in complete harmony, how your thoughts and emotions also move in the same direction, forward, synchronizing with the

the vitality, the authenticity of this moment and take a few moments to reflect on this experience, that ether with the thoughts and not being "driven by the thoughts".

After practicing this exercise, take five minutes to write down – in the space below – how you felt.

Michael's answer:

It was an interesting exercise again. As a rule, I go 90% with the music from the headphones. It was somewhat similar to the previous exercise, only that the feeling of connection with the body was much more intense. This was a bit easier, because there were a lot of external stimuli to focus on, kinesthetic and proprioceptive sensations. The harmony of the body was much easier to observe and the final result was much more intense, a cognitive restart from a practical point of view. I somehow felt refreshed and much more connected to the present moment after doing the exercise.

When fear and anxiety appear, they can drain you. It may seem difficult to stay in that situation and you may feel an acute need to escape. You want to get rid of this discomfort as quickly as possible, which is normal. The urge to do something can have the explosive force of a violent storm and make you feel out of control or scared. However, it is good to remember that big storms do not arise all at once, they are at first small winds and light rains, with some thunder and lightning, they can reach a climax, but then they end on the horizon, where they came from.

EXERCISE 1.8. EMBRACE THE STORM!

Exercise purpose: reducing the negative impact of words, images, emotions; building the skill of detachment and non-evaluative observation

Sit comfortably in the chair and close your eyes slowly. Observe the rhythm of your breathing for a few moments. It's time to think about a recent situation in which you felt the acute need to escape, to give up, to run away. Take a few deep breaths and try to relive the situation: "Where was I? With whom? What happened? What did I feel, what did I do, what did I think then? But now?"

Associate all these experiences with a storm of fear and anxiety, which is rolling strongly towards you. You can hear thunder and even feel pain, pressure and other disturbing sensations exploding in your face, you can notice thoughts, images, emotions, like some lightning strikes. You are in the midst of the storm, which surrounds you in all its wildness. You can choose to do something you have never done before. Embrace the storm. Open your arms wide and look deep into the experience you are reliving, without trying to suppress it, without fighting it. Look at it gently, breathe with it... allow it to exist. The storm may try to divert you from your desired path, but remain attentive and look with compassion and curiosity at the energy and pain, as you would do with a dear friend in distress. Watch how the storm moves away and things calm down. But something new remains in one's being, something new and good, the power to embrace the storm and resist the urge to run away from it, remain dignified and live the experiences as they come, more slowly or more violently.

Come back to the present and slowly open your eyes. Reflect for a few moments on what you have experienced and learned.

Write down how this exercise helped you.

Michael's answer:

Until I could feel the storm, it was very difficult, but somehow it came. Then, everything was very intense, a long series of events and moods began, second by second and "flashbacks". The temptation was very strong to give up the exercise, respectively to disconnect and listen to some music, whatever. I stayed like that and continued, however I managed to tell myself that this is what happened and what kept me in the zone was to repeat to myself that it passed, although the memory is still very vivid. I told myself that now I am more mature, more adult and most importantly I have the strategy to manage this. Then I was able to look more objectively, things calmed down, but I feel very tired now. I think practice is still needed here.

The three exercises above help you be present in your own life. Try to practice them daily, introduce the observation and contemplation of the related thoughts, emotions, images, sensations and move in the desired direction with them. You can set a daily alarm to remind yourself to notice your experiences as they are, to be present in the midst of them; just to notice them and to simply live them.

Homework for the first week:
1. Do the centering exercise daily, according to the script.
2. Make room for exercises in your daily routine: "OBSERVE YOUR THOUGHTS!" "TAKE YOUR MIND OUT FOR A WALK!" "EMBRACING THE STORM!"
3. Remember that the breath is always with you, focus on it.

**Slow down if you need to, take your time working the
modules and they will work for you!**

MODULE 2 - WE ARE MORE THAN OUR STRESS AND ANXIETY (The detachment process)

“The fact that we exist is the only real constant. No experience rises to the level that we exist. Our self is real, the sentence “I am.” is real.” (Sri Ramana Maharshi)

Objectives of this module:

- to understand what internalized homophobia is;
- to get used to The term observer and impartial observer;
- to let us experience a short meditation;
- to accept our own past;
- to exercise the process of detachment.

You have gone through the introductory module, so you are familiar with the specifics of ACT therapy and the benefits of this approach. You have also identified the most relevant sources of minority stress that cause you discomfort and have become familiar with the main myths about anxiety. Continue to practice the exercises in the first module and put into practice the learned skills.

Heterosexism and internalized homophobia

In a predominantly heterosexual society, the values and practices that are circulated in most environments are conceived by the majority from their perspective and have the role of validating and meeting their needs. This is why most societies (including Romania) have adopted a predominantly heterosexual view of sexuality. But this would not be inappropriate if there were a secure space for manifesting the diversity of sexual orientations. Unfortunately, society as a whole, and certain groups in particular, have very little tolerance for other sexual orientations. Thus, the dominant attitude can become a

predominantly hetero-existent and homophobic one. Heterosexism refers to the belief that heterosexuality is the only or superior form of sexual orientation. Homophobia refers to all anti-homosexual practices and ideologies and is associated with a set of incorrectly formulated beliefs about gay people.

Each of us grew up and formed in a certain social environment that shaped our attitudes and values. For this reason, it has been found that gay people can internalize some of the values (and even prejudices) of the heterosexual society in which they grew up. Thus, people of any sexual orientation can hold heterosexual or homophobic attitudes and distortions.

It is possible that you too, through the education and values with which you were impregnated in childhood, have internalized homophobic attitudes even without being aware of it. And these internalized homophobic attitudes have come into conflict with your sexual orientation, probably generating a long series of self-denigration and self-criticism.

At the beginning of this program we evaluated some aspects to make a more detailed picture of the situation of each person included in the program. Among other things, we evaluated internalized homophobia and the daily heterosexist experiences you face. If you think it is useful, we encourage you to talk to your psychologist. about the results achieved and what you could do to better manage these issues.

1. THE OBJECTER PERSPECTIVE

We have found that people who struggle with anxiety problems take over these barriers and incorporate them into their identity. Antonia, a cis lesbian, was always talking about “her strange love affairs that are kept secret” And Philip, a gay man, he said “the shame of being gay overwhelms me sometimes / I consider it a burden”.

It is very easy to become caught up in thoughts like “I am strange” or “I am strange. I am abnormal, so you don’t even know when it’s happening. Every time you say, “I am strange or abnormal, you become what follows after “I am” – in this case strange and

abnormal . You label yourself and you fully identify with the problems that bothers you, and become the thing you most hate. And that is painful.

If you feel a little irritated reading this, you should. But at the same time congratulate yourself, for it means that the healthy and jumping part of the mind you oppose the association with a psychiatric label or disorder.

2. WORRIES, ANXIETIES AND FEARS ARE JUST A PART OF OURSELVES

Remember that all emotions and thoughts are just a part of us and not the essence. It is a very important difference. But it is also difficult to understand with our rational mind. That is why we will rely on the various exercises in this chapter so that you allow your experiences to guide you.

Anxiety and fear are the emotions we experience periodically. They can “explode” in consciousness, but after a while, they disappear. You, the person who lives and observes their own life – you are different from the emotions of anxiety, shame, stress, and fear. All thoughts or emotions have their own moment on stage, and then they disappear. The only constant is you – the audience – the observer of your own life.

To understand this better, imagine the moment of your birth. Every person enters this world in the same way. We are born into the world, but we do not have the experience of this world. We have two eyes that look at the world. At first we are like an empty container.

And then we begin to gather experiences: We taste, touch, feel. We begin to talk, we talk about our past, about ourselves, about our future. We gather experiences that are sweet, bitter, and deeply earthly. Over time, from moment to moment, we will continue to gather experience. Our container is no longer empty. In time, it continues to fill and will continue as long as we are alive.

You too have a container, which contains all the events you have been through and have lived up to this point. And you might spend a lot of time with the things you’ve

gathered up to this moment. You may identify with them. You may be trying to get rid of some of them, cover things you don't like so much, or rearrange them so that it's not so hard to carry.

But here comes the question: "What is the only constant that has been with you throughout your life so far? Is this the experience you have gathered? Or, it is that container, that pure self?". You were there when you came into the world, before you became aware of human hardship and pain, before you felt loss and joy, before you had trauma, and before anxiety was a problem. That container is you, the owner and observer of your life, your only one safe refuge. This pure self is always there and, with training, you can learn to feel it clearer and let it help and lead you.

Instead of relying on words to explain these phenomena, let's look at some examples, live what we describe, be the impartial and silent observer of our lives. Imagine listening to your favorite song. While the song comes through speakers or headphones, who is listening? It is true that your ears and your brain perceive and process individual notes, but who connects notes in a way we call music? It is the silent observer within you, the one who is always present and witnesses everything that is happening inside you. (v Deepak Chopra, 2003).

A wonderful thing is that you can take the perspective of this silent observer at any time with any of your experiences, especially those that make you feel anxious. For example, when you feel your heart beating fast, be careful who notices and who listens to your heart: Again, it is the silent observer – the motionless presence within you. He is still and silent because he does not judge your experiences. He is just a witness to them in an impartial way.

Looking at your experiences from this observer's perspective, it could help you place less emphasis on your fears, anxieties, and concerns about your sexual orientation. However, they occupy only part of the scene, only a moment in time, they are a wave in the ocean of existence. You don't have to fight them. And you don't have to join them. Your

task it's just to notice them. Just let the tide of stress, shame and fear come and go. Look at them from the safe shore of this ocean.

You may think that we suggest you become a cold and unemotional person. It is not true at all! When you form an overview and anchor yourself in the present, you do not become numb or detached from your experience. In fact, this strategy can help you get more involved in your emotional and mental life by putting you at the opposite pole of avoidance. Being an observer gives you the space to choose what you want get involved, what to give up and what to do with time and energy you.

So ask yourself if you have enough psychological space to accept your own being in its fullness, which includes your sexual orientation. If not, what's in the way of your experiences? And if any emotion or unpleasant thought arises, see if you can make room for it, try to accept that it is there, kindly and without negative assessments.

3. LEARNING TO TAKE THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE IMPARTIAL OBSERVATORY

If you really want to fulfill your ideals, you must anchor yourself in the present. The past and the future, the place where our thoughts often slip, should make room for the here and now. Remember: The present is where you live!

The first way to stay anchored in the present is to listen to your body. You can do this by observing your own breath, heartbeat, posture, and areas of tension or stiffness. Notice any significant sensation in your body. areas that hurt or feel hot or heavy or trembling. This is not an easy trick to learn, which is why it should be practiced every day. If you want to apply these tricks in a moment of crisis, created by your fear, it is good to practice them first in other circumstances. Exercise helps you do that.

The second way to stay anchored in the present is to follow your conscious mind – your thoughts and emotions. During any unpleasant episode caused by anxiety and worry, or stress that you belong to a sexual minority, you could address some key questions. Here are some:

- How I feel in addition to anxiety, stress, fear, or tension?
- What do I say to myself? What thoughts do I have?
- What do I want to do now? How much do I feel the need to avoid the discomfort that overwhelms me?
- How would I want to be now? How do I want my life to be now?

A useful strategy to stay in the present is to use a simple rhyme to remember your role. of the observer.

“Look and listen, otherwise you don’t know what you’re missing.”

When you are aware of negative judgment and evaluation, do not feed them. And if you find yourself judging, then just observe this judgment, without rebuking you for it. In the end, a judgment is just another thought. Don’t let her catch you and pull you toward her. For the observer, a thought or image does not identify with good or evil, but merely represents observation, experimentation, and learning.

4. HOW IS IT TO TAKE THE OBSERVER'S PERSPECTIVE?

Many people find it difficult to imagine what it is like to look at their own life and experience from an observer’s perspective. Although the silent observer is always with us, we are simply not taught to look at things from that perspective.

The observer self is like the sky. Thoughts and emotions are like the weather. The weather always changes, but no matter how strong the wind blows, THE WEATHER CANNOT HURT THE SKY. Not even the worst storm, the wildest cyclone, or the coldest snowstorm, can hurt the sky. And no matter how scary the weather may become; the sky has plenty of room for everything. And if we are willing to stay, sooner or later we will see how the weather is going. (Remember the exercise “embrace the Storm!”) Sometimes we forget that the sky is there because of the clouds that cover it. But if we go high enough, even the darkest and heaviest clouds cannot prevent us from reaching the blue sky above them. This immense space, the sky, extends in all directions, without borders, without

beginning or end. Through meditation, you. you can learn how to get in touch with this part of yourself – an open and safe space right inside you, from which you can observe and make room for even the most difficult thought or the most negative emotion.

5. THE ADVANTAGE OF TAKING THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE IMPARTIAL OBSERVATORY

You may wonder why it is important to be an observer and how it is to look at your experience. from that perspective. The great advantage of the impartial observer is that it allows us to follow what is happening without being put in a position of choice. This will allow us to stop struggling with judgments and labeling.

Until now, you may have had the impression that worrying thoughts and emotions control you by their intensity. In the heat of the moment, it may seem that they are taking control of you. so much so that you feel lost in those thoughts and emotions. In times like these, it is difficult for us to see how thoughts, worries, or emotions are just parts of us. They are not the same person and we do not own them. Like clouds, they come and go on their own. We cannot remove them, nor can we retain them.

EXERCISE 4.1. BE THE CHESSBOARD!

Purpose: Familiarize yourself with the concept of an impartial observer's perspective.

- 1. Imagine that you are in a chess game. The anxiety team holds the black pawns, and the other team represents your counterattack. Thus, when the black fool attacks (eg: I will stress again that i am bisexual!), you head to the white madman and go into battle to attack the black one (e.g.: i run, avoid, fight, resist).*
- 2. Breathe.*
- 3. Direct your thoughts to something else.*
- 4. Remember that you are a strong person.*

- 5 did you lose or win?
6. Reflect a few moments on what you felt during the "struggle".
7. Imagine now that you are the chessboard and watch a battle between white and black pieces.
8. Reflect a few moments on this perspective.

Note what you felt from the player's perspective, then from the chess board's perspective.

Below is Raul's perspective: *Although I have accepted myself as a gay man for a long time and have no problem with what I am, I applied it to another area. One of my current stress factors is that I will not perform so well on the labor market once I graduate from college. In fact, I fear that not much will be chosen by my career and all my academic sacrifices will be useless, as I will become unemployed. But through this exercise I saw my thoughts as mere thoughts arising from my anxiety. I managed to stop the statements such as "my grades are not good enough", "I will not be able to do an internship", "I will close when I leave the college." Not only did I tell myself that I was strong, I told myself that I was capable and intelligent enough to get where I wanted to go, and that I was no longer willing to spend my resources with such thoughts. They are just a game on my chessboard and seeing them from above I understood that it is better to let them pass.*

There is a delicate problem in this chess game. Unlike the traditional chess game, in this game there are no two different teams represented by the players. Here, the two competing teams are actually one team, represented by you. The thoughts, emotions, and actions of both teams are your thoughts, emotions, and actions. They all belong to you because you are the representative of both teams. The game is complicated because both teams know their movements. Regardless of the winning team, a part of you will always be part of the team that loses. How can you win when some of your thoughts and emotions (e.g., those related to sexual orientation) compete against other thoughts and emotions that belong to you? It is a war of self, which is why you cannot win it. That is why this war will last for years and you will feel powerless.

What if we looked at this scene from a different angle? What if the chess pieces were no longer controlled by you? Could you figure out who else it could be?

What if you would you be a chess board? This is a very important role. Without the board, there is no game. As a board, you see all the pieces and you can watch the game, remaining on neutral ground. Instead, if you are a player, the end of the game is very important, you must fight with worries, anxiety and fear, as if your life. it would depend on it.

So, the chessboard doesn't worry about the winner. It does not have a favorite team and does not get involved in the game. It simply provides a game space.

6. THE SELF AS A SILENT OBSERVER

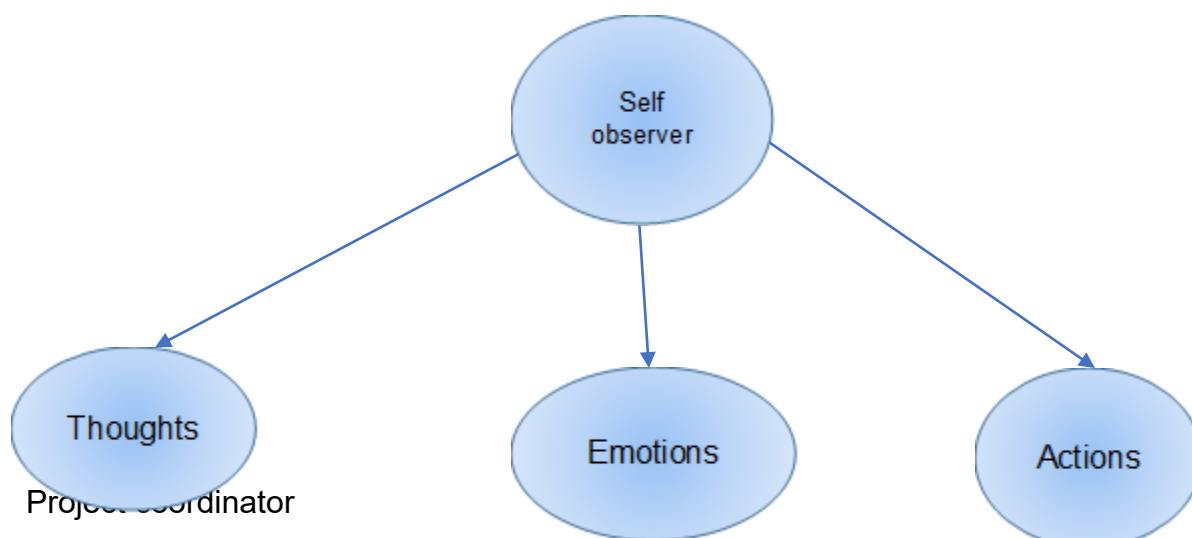
To get an idea of what the observer's posture is, we can study the case of Elena (a lesbian cisgender woman). She is a manager at an advertising company. Six months ago, one of her co-workers saw her in the out while she was walking hand in hand with her partner. Within a few days they learned about her sexual orientation and some colleagues started making jokes (stinging) and discriminatory remarks about her.

After that week Elena relived the painful memories of her adolescence in a small village in Maramureş, where she had been ridiculed, verbally abused and threatened with physical violence “if she doesn’t recover.” At work he could no longer concentrate on solving tasks as before, and her collaboration with colleagues became increasingly tense. At the moment she's afraid she'd lose her job.

She was asked to explain her emotions. Elena merged with all these experiences and could no longer “see” beyond them. The therapist suggested to Elena to do an exercise called *the Self as the Silent Observer*. He encouraged her to do a short centering exercise, then drew a circle and wrote in it “the Self as the Silent Observer.” Under this circle he drew three more circles. In the first he wrote "thoughts", in the second "emotions" and in the third, "actions".

“Think of the chessboard exercise and imagine you are the board. This is the place we call the Self as the Silent Observer – it is not a real place, but rather a perspective that you can take over to look at your experiences. It’s where you can see yourself – you can see what’s going on with you. without having to intervene or comment. Now, from the perspective of that silent observer, fill in the other fields.”

This is what the exercise looks like after Elena has completed it. As you can see, thoughts, emotions, and actions are now separate and yet connected and in contact with the observer self.



Project coordinator

Exercise 4.2. Elena's Example - the Self as the Silent observer	
Thoughts	<i>I'm going crazy, I want everything to stop.</i>
Emotions	<i>Anxious, tense, frightened, frustrated.</i>
Actions	<i>I can't work, I'm spending time at home, my sleep is troubled, I avoid places.</i>

EXERCISE 4.2. THE SELF AS A SILENT OBSERVER	
Purpose: Familiarity with the concept of observer self	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extract from the "BOOK OF LIFE" a difficult situation related to your sexual orientation. 2. Try to relive that difficult situation. 3. Observe your rhythm breathing, in the chest and stomach. 4. Try to visualize that difficult and unpleasant moment. 5. Observe from the perspective of the Self as an observer every aspect of the experience. 6. Identify the thoughts, emotions and actions you took then. Write them down in the table below, as in Elena's example. 	
Thoughts	
Emotions	
Actions	

There is another important aspect that you can highlight with this Self exercise as a silent observer. Your behavior is different from your thoughts. You can be overwhelmed by thoughts and emotions and yet act appropriately, dealing with the situation. Thoughts and emotions do not create actions. You create them! The most important thing to remember is this simple answer: You can choose the actions. You can act under the impulse of your emotions and fight them or avoid them, or you can act as your life experience and mind dictate (i.e., stay in the situation and do what you have to do).

You can notice the discomfort you feel and treat it with compassion, kindness, curiosity and openness. Just look at it from the perspective of the silent observer. When

you do that, you don't need to take someone's side or judge. Instead, you will be able to choose other behaviors to increase your quality of life.

By developing the perspective of the silent observer, you will put all activities in place. This will help you learn that what you do, feel, and think is a part of who you are, but does not identify with yourself. This approach can give you more psychological space to move and find the power to choose how to act. Remember: you can fight the world inside of you or you can accept it and step forward with it. This choice is entirely yours.

It would be very useful to develop your ability as a silent observer, working with unpleasant experiences from your past. It may help if you start with less difficult episodes. The most important thing is to exercise.

7. WHO AM I REALLY?

Most people might be a little disoriented if you asked them who they are. They might say, "My name is..." as they point to their body. Or you will hear references to life roles such as: Sexual partner, coach, LGBT activist, receptionist, artist. Is this really who we are?

Who are we? Let's imagine that we can identify with our body. It means that we should ask, "which model do you refer to, the model in 1980, the model of 1995, the model of 2008 or maybe the one 2020?" We have the same name our parents gave us at birth, but we know that our model from 2008 is not the same as 1995. And science informs us that most of the cells in our body are replaced by others in less than a year – every year! So who are we?

If many of our body's cells have been replaced several times, we are clearly not the body we were born with. But does that mean we are not the same person? We all have a sense of continuity in our lives. Deep down, and intuitively, we feel that no matter how old we are, wherever we were, or whatever we thought, felt, and did, we have always been the same "I" we are now. There is something about us that doesn't seem to change. We

all know and feel but none of us can adequately describe and put into words. Remember, the container was there before you. have words to describe yourself!

8. MEDITATION - THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION "WHO AM I?"

Becoming a good observer is important because it represents a new useful perspective for anyone struggling with fear, anxiety, and worry. To demonstrate this, look at the following list of statements. Notice what is happening inside you. when you read the first four statements and then complete the last four statements with disturbing personal descriptions that your mind intrusively exposes to you.

- I am an anxious person.
- I am weird or maybe damned.
- I am not like others.
- I am not a successful man.
- I am
- I am
- I am

You have noticed how the mind started working on these statements, perhaps agreeing or disagreeing with them, reformulating or qualifying them, making them stronger? You've been used to clinging to self-descriptions like they are like this or that, and you end up consuming more time and energy to deny these claims, as if you were in a war. But it is the mind that contrives these statements, when in fact the only truth is that they simply are.

This is not a mere philosophical or abstract idea, but a practical skill that can be helpful in many situations. We are often asked how we can best react when we are in situations where we call for self-descriptions.

The answer is very simple: I am neither, nor otherwise, but rather, I am. I am none other than my own person. Answering the question who am I really? By a simple or even disarming statement, *I am*, you allow yourself to let go of all these self-valuative statements that your mind has presented to you. It is the easiest way to get through these situations, once and for all, at any moment. No arguments, no explanations, no justifications and so on. I AM WHO I AM!

The mantra is a sequence of short words or phrases spoken in Sanskrit, but it can also be words in Romanian. Literally, mantra means “that which robs our minds and thoughts.” Although the mantra will not literally take your mind away, after a certain time, it will help your mind enter a state of stillness and peace without effort. While you will silently repeat the mantra, you will automatically overcome the thought layer of the mind, to reach a place of pure awareness, a place surrounded by deep silence within you.

The mantra takes you beyond the evaluative side of the mind and gives you an idea of what it means to experience inner stillness and pure self-awareness. Over time, you will be able to enter this state of meditation and inner stillness, but only through exercise.

Many people use meditation techniques in the hope that they will stop their own mind from negative evaluations. However, regardless of the type of meditation used against the mind by force, it is not effective. Our mind is filled to the brim with thoughts, emotions, sensations, worries, or fantasies. This is perfectly normal even during meditation, with one exception: During meditation, the mind should not be engaged in such games and should not be directed in a certain sense.

We advise you to choose words, for your mantra, from the lexical field of love or compassion, because they hold many meanings. The purpose of this meditation is to go beyond the literal meaning of the word and to leave the intellectual “layer” of the mind. Thus, try not to focus your attention or simply stop thinking. Make room for what the mind proposes, with its own thoughts. Do not resist, accept your mind. as it is.

EXERCISE 4.3. "I AM" (MANTRA)

Purpose: Leaving the intellectual part of the mind and observing the pure Self

1. Sit in a comfortable position in your seat. Sit with your body upright and rest your hands on your feet. The legs can be crossed or not, it is your choice. Close your eyes slowly. (Stay that way for 15 seconds).
2. Let your breath flow naturally, without influencing this process. (Stay that way for 20 seconds)
3. It's time to think about THE I AM mantra, very gentle and effortless. Then start, say the mantra calmly, without worrying about its rhythm or sound.
4. After a certain time you will notice thoughts or images or maybe even physiological sensations. The moment you notice them, gently return to the mantra....I am...I am...the most important thing is to accept everything as it is. So when you return to the mantra, it is important to do so in a gentle way.
5. Do not focus your attention on things and try not to control your mind. Remember, when you notice that your mind is It is foreign to the act of meditation, return gently to your mantra, I am... I am... I am... I am... I am... I am... I am... I am...
6. Continue the silent utterance for 10 minutes until you hear everything as a harmonious sound of bells I am...I am...I am...I am...
7. Now, stop thinking about the mantra, take a break and enjoy the sweetness of the quiet moment gained through meditation. Keep your eyes closed for 3 minutes. After this time, open your eyes and return to your activities.

Write down some of what you have noticed or experienced during the exercise.

Almost any change can be scary. But the idea of repeating the old actions, which had no noticeable results, is even more frightening. If you want to have a happy life, you need to engage in new actions. Be patient. An essential condition for fully embracing the present is to reconcile with the past, which for many of us can be more or less difficult.

9. RECONCILIATION WITH A DIFFICULT PAST

Our past is full of moments of all kinds—dark, cheerful, or neutral. Most people remember very little of their past. But you know that the past is much more than what you remember. It is full of shades, from very sweet to very bitter. What you remember can leave you feeling alive, or it can awaken older wounds. Your memories and their impact on life depend on how you react to them, whether you consider them friends or enemies.

Sometimes we gain wisdom from the memory of events and learn from them to live wiser and more fully. You may discover an inner strength, a new appreciation of life, and make certain decisions: to make such a way that you no longer experience difficulties like those experienced. But, sometimes memories have the opposite effect: they keep us stuck in the past, reliving old wounds over and over again, without any clear purpose.

EXERCISE 4.4: THE PAST AND THE PERSON

Purpose: Awareness of the ability to retain things over time

1. *Please note two numbers, randomly: 17 and 4.*

Do not write them. Just answer the next question quietly, without looking at the written ones. What were the numbers?

2. *Try to remember what the numbers were in ten minutes from now. What if I asked you at the end of the chapter? Suppose you get a reward, like, say, you would earn a million dollars if you told us the numbers in ten years from now. Do you think you could remember them? We believe you will succeed. Again, what were the numbers?*

Note what you have noticed by doing this exercise.

Here's Alex's example: I managed to keep the numbers for a period of 10 minutes and even better, but I am convinced that I would not be able to retain them for a long period of time, even if it were a financial incentive or any benefit. I found exercise very interesting about anxiety. Very true, to some extent we choose to retain what we want and what helps us further. But errors can also occur, in which we retain too much or even move away from the purpose of remembering the difficulties encountered in life: to help us better manage those situations in the future, not to cause "blockages".

Let's take a step back and look at this exercise. How many seconds did it take us to do something that has now become a memory? Maybe ten seconds? And now you have two numbers, with no meaning, that are walking in the corners of your mind. Notice that you have not chosen to have those numbers in mind. But now, these numbers are there, in your mind. Next, you. you are the one who chooses the importance that it gives them.

The memories evoke things that happened in the past. They have no real substance. They may be associated with the context in which they appeared or with other thoughts and emotions. They can then be reactivated by thoughts/emotions or similar contexts. However, our memory is just that – a collection of images, thoughts, physiological sensations and emotions. They can appear instantly. Often the pain or anxiety we experience is real, but the source of the pain/anxiety comes from our minds. A painful memory is not the same as a painful event or an event in which your life has been threatened. Memories are representations of past events. Your life is unfolding currently. The things that are repeating now are the thoughts and emotional pain you have experienced in the past.

You have noticed that the mind and body are constantly producing sensations and experiences over which we have little control. So are memories – they can appear in consciousness without much effort on our part. And memories often contain images—things we can see as if we were watching a movie. These images are often “contaminated” by negative judgments, or may be accompanied by intense emotions, some of which may be pleasant and others unpleasant.

The ability to remember past experiences is very useful. We can intelligently benefit from even painful or traumatic experiences from the past, to move forward avoiding previous mistakes. In other words, the past can be used to appreciate what we have and to make the most of the time we have left.

It's easy to stay stuck with the past. You may have been physically or verbally abused, you may have experienced an interpersonal conflict, a break up, an accident, a rape, a loss, you may regret the missed opportunities or the choices you made. You may

have had a difficult childhood, or you are angry and resentful the way your parents and friends have treated you because of your sexual orientation. Remembering some of these experiences may leave you with an overwhelming feeling of guilt or shame. Or maybe you think about the beautiful experiences of the past (e.g., from a little childhood) and feel sadness because you now lack these experiences. But know that there is nothing wrong with remembering the good and bad, beautiful and ugly moments you have been through.

It's also fine if you don't like to remember a part of your past. Everyone has stories they'd rather forget. Some have more frightening occurrences than others have – but everyone has such memories. But being stuck to the past and lingering there is a trap that prevents us from enjoying the present (the only thing that matters).

10. THE STORIES ABOUT OURSELVES AND THE DOCUMENTARY OF SELF

Do you remember the “be the Chessboard” exercise? You are the chessboard, over which the pawns (past and present experiences) come and go. Each game has its own coordinates and strategy, but the board does not change. Many games can be played on the same chessboard.

The mind always works with materials from the past and builds a coherent story of our past, and we will act as an actor under the guidance of the director that plays with the scenes while he is making a movie. The mind, like a director, is selective and builds a kind of story, even if, in fact, the mind is not the same. representation of a past event it changes sometimes.

To see what results from this process, suppose you would like to make a movie about the wonders of Africa. So you go with the film crew and collect a lot of sequences. These sequences feature landscapes, wild animals, colorful plants, exotic dishes, colorful clothes and various tribal rituals. But that's not all. You have also gathered sequences that capture the bodies of animals, poachers, tribes in battle, men and children carrying weapons of war, babies and children dying of hunger and thirst, disease, hunger and

poverty. The crew records sequences of abuse, rape, drought and natural disasters. But don't forget that you. Make a film about the wonders of Africa. So when you go back to the studio, review all the sequences, cut all the unpleasant images and leave them aside.

Your mind does the same with the past, but sometimes tends to keep the unpleasant sequences and ignore the beautiful ones. Unfortunately, if you have experienced trauma, hardship and pain related to your sexual orientation, your mind you can focus more on these negative sequences when creating the film of life and it can leave unused the extraordinary sequences you've had.

In a way, your mind is trying to protect you. If you have a past full of traumatic and painful experiences, the most important thing for your mind. it helps you avoid the same events. But the mind does not know how to achieve this in a balanced and favorable way. So, to create your own movie, you need to see the scenes your mind tends to leave behind unused. That means looking at both dark moments and happy and beautiful moments you've had.

The following exercise will help you do exactly that. All you need is availability, a little curiosity and a little light. Don't forget why you're doing this: To get rid of the shackles of the past, honoring your personal history, and moving forward in ways that are consistent with your principles.

Let's start by describing the documentary of life the movie that your mind. it displays it most often. Imagine you are following your past. which would be projected on the screen of a cinema. What are the experiences and events that make up the story of your life? What events and experiences are your mind going to? and how do you use them to describe a story about yourself?

THE EXERCISE: 4.5. DOCUMENTARY OF THE SELF (part one)

Purpose: To accept the past by observing it

The film of life – scene 1

Write down a paragraph, describing what your mind spontaneously tells you. about your own life, about your own sexual orientation. It is okay if what you are describing contains more dark moments. It's okay if you come to mind especially pleasant moments. Just write everything, as if no one will ever find out what you are writing now. Let your thoughts flow naturally. You don't need to have an ending scene.

Here is Andrea's example: Before I started, what I read earlier changed my perspective a little bit, that if I wasn't reading that description and realizing how many happy moments were caused by my different sexual orientation (my friends who were loyal to me, supported and understood me from the first moments), this movie would have been a real drama. Now, it would be more motivating, encouraging. My childhood was normal, even old-fashioned, that I spent all my summers at my grandparents in the village and I did not have an unhealthy passion for the computer. I read a lot of fantasy and adventure books, I had a rich imagination, I was sitting in nature, in the field, walking through the woods, etc. The change became when I told my mother about my sexual orientation, at almost 15 years old Since then, things have been very gray/intense. There were many abuses, quarrels, reproaches and everything was even traumatic. I was put on medication, I took self-harm in the 9 a grade and I developed a lot of social anxiety (I was walking to school and back, I felt like everyone knew my "intimacy"). And I moved away from my friends, I didn't live any longer. Then, from nowhere, I told myself that I couldn't do it anymore, and I told my school psychologist everything. After that, my parents sent me to a psychologist, more of the idea of "changing myself", but there I managed to overcome the real mental obstacles that I had accumulated over all those years I managed to manage that environment better, although things were the same. I haven't had panic attacks 20 times a day. From there, things took a turn, returning to a relatively normal life, with tiny but more or less constant steps. I came back to my old friendships, accumulated new ones and managed to understand myself as a person. Yes, I'm not the perfect person, by far, I have days when I can't get together to do anything, rare emotional explosions, I haven't experienced love and I feel very lonely sometimes, but life is supposed to be a constant process of learning, so, as long as I've become a better person this year than last year, everything is fine.

Now take a break and take a deep breath a few times and then read, slowly but also aloud, exactly what you wrote above during this time and be aware that you can observe the scenario, such as the chessboard. Notice the words you used. What kind of story did you write? How old is it? Is there a particular event or thing that you simply can't get out of your mind NOW? Is it something you are living now that is truly your enemy? Just notice and observe if you can open yourself and be an impartial observer. Do not rush the process. And when you are ready, continue with part two.

THE EXERCISE: 4.5. DOCUMENTARY OF THE SELF (part two)

Purpose: To accept the past by observing it

The film of life – scene 2

It is time to write a new script. Copy the facts from scene 1 – the experiences that really happened or you went through. But this time you will add other things to the story. WHAT EXPERIENCES ARE MISSING? WHAT ELSE CAN YOU ADD? Think of the experiences the mind leaves aside, even small moments, or experiences that you remember with little effort. Neutral, sweet or dark, it doesn't matter. And it doesn't matter if it matches the original story. In fact, look at experiences that seem ordinary or unusual, like eating a hamburger, a hot shower, a movie, or an unexpected encounter. Enrich the script. Give yourself at least five minutes to write and rewrite this new scene. This story should be longer than the first one.

Here is Alex's example: I told my mother I was gay, I was different. It was a very long night, I could not sleep at all and I was trembling. The next day, the priest came to our house to see what to do. Then Aunt. Dramas, crises, cries everywhere, and I was incomprehensible. I had a terrible guilt seeing my mother crying in that way and I didn't understand practically that I wouldn't be guilty. I tried to suture, argue, but nothing was good and I received appellations continuously. Things went on worse, I was missing from school and I went into the middle of the class without care and I even got to self harm (I did myself harm) and medication. It became something problematic. I don't care about anything, especially myself. It was relevant when I started going to the gym, another hall and alone, without my friends. I felt so detached, quiet, even ideal. The world was very friendly and I even made some friends. It was hard for me to leave that friendly environment focused on personal development (both physically and mentally from my perspective) and get home to that atmosphere based on guilt,

against productivity and everything else. So, I remember when I left the room, I always smoked a cigarette and looked outside at the summer garden. I was always thinking about some ways to resist mentally, and with time I really succeeded, and I was preparing for what was coming home. There was always something. I remember going to the shower in the evening and, like breathing exercises and centering in the present moment, I was focusing on how the water flows on me, it was something extraordinary (unfortunately I haven't done this in a few years, I forgot about it). I have a succession of about 20 frames, in which I told my friends that I was gay, a succession full of enthusiasm and support, when I saw that I could find my support somewhere other than at home. I had learned not long ago that I no longer needed anyone's approval or someone else's validation. But I think that helps us develop as individuals, and even motivate ourselves to move forward. I remember once a week going to the school psychologist to tell us about what and how it has happened since we hadn't seen each other. It was a wonderful atmosphere, I drank a cup of tea and felt safe. I was accepted and encouraged for who I am. And I managed, now that I look back, to overcome so much and become the person I am today.

Take a break again, take a deep breath and read aloud what you wrote. Notice the words... just observe what is there with a sense of kindness, curiosity and tenderness. What kind of story do you have? Is it old? Does this story, from the second part, captivate you in the same way as the first? Is there anything you are experiencing now that is truly your enemy? Reflect a few moments and when you are ready, keep reading.

THE EXERCISE: 4.5. DOCUMENTARY OF THE SELF (part three)

Purpose: To accept the past by observing it

The film of life – scene 3

Now, if you allow us, we invite you to repeat this exercise once more. Once again, copy the facts from scene 2 and ADD OTHER EXPERIENCES YOU HAVE HAD. You can add experiences you have forgotten over time – experiences from the distant past or recent experiences. Then rewrite the script by adding to the old one, without removing anything specific. This story should be longer than scenario 2. Give yourself at least five minutes to write and rewrite these things.

Below is Andrew's example: When I told my mother that I was gay, the reaction was very intense. After a sleepless night, the next day I woke up and the priest was in the living room. A life totally alien to me had begun, in which my mother behaved like in a parallel universe. Suddenly, I was no longer the child he was fond of and cuddled, I was a beast, "a sick, disgruntled, crazy, selfish, and corrupt." In fact, I was just a different kid. It took a long time to really understand this, and many arguments and traumatic situations were to be endured. Immediately after coming out, sitting in those conditions and having no other option to go, despite all my attempts to make them understand, I ended up doing self-harm and being prescribed medication. My school situation was in complete fall, I was missing school and I didn't care in general. I could not perceive how, in a fraction of a second, from that innocent and good child I became the last man, as my mother considered me. It was very hard and practical, from the unconditional support I had before, I ended up having to be mentally on my own. I had no one to talk to, no one to help me solve my difficulties, no one to consult with practically. It was just me in a dark abyss. That's how I came to develop a thousand fears, to be anxious about what tomorrow will bring, and eventually to cut my hand and take Xanax prescribed by the psychiatrist. I was forced to have sex with women based on the idea that "lust comes by eating", I was sent to no longer know how many monasteries and priests, I was passed through all the possible waters. The moment was in grade 10, when I realized that no human being can exist in these long-term conditions without developing something very mentally pathological. And yet, I don't care much, but somehow, it was a trace of regret, thinking about all the possibilities I could have had, how many dreams I had and that still, given my young age, I had accomplished everything I wanted. And I was sorry, I burst into crying on my own in the attic of the house, realizing that I don't want to let this happen, that if I'm not strong enough I won't be able to handle it on my own, either i will go to a psychiatric hospital or worse, home under

their supervision, without being able to work because i have lost my mental balance. And I was afraid of how hard it would be and not let it happen. The only way I saw logic then, and it was, was to ask for help. I spoke with my school psychologist, with whom I developed a special relationship, which came up with short-term conclusive solutions and gave me new perspectives. Then my friends became, one by one, pillars of support in all the difficulties. Things became somewhat tolerable, not because there was any change in my parents, but because I had somehow learned to go through so much abuse. I developed a thousand fears, the worst being social anxiety, I had 20 attacks a day, but the luck was that my own would send me to a very qualified psychologist. I learned practically to manage myself, and I managed to manage anxiety well, even though I still have traces today. Another difference was going to the room. Basically, I found a more friendly environment, and “allowed” by parents, where it was an oasis of freedom for me. I felt more productive and self-satisfied, it was a detachment and an opportunity to socialize. Now I realized, being the youngest member there, and very sociable and polite of a kind, somehow I was “pampered” by everyone, that everyone helped me with training tips (extremely useful then, and now), about diet and even how to develop that strong sportsmanlike mentality, called in the people, so that i can get to realize what you have set out (in life more). So it was great to be able to be a normal person again for even 2 hours a day. In all these dramas, I am perfectly aware that they have made me a stronger person and manage a lot. I have a different perspective, even though I tend to fall into depression and bad days more often than my friends, but I have developed the ability to manage a lot. And as long as we live, we will always have things to learn. All my friendships have intensified after coming out.

Take a break again, take a deep breath and read aloud what you wrote. You can notice that the story is richer and more authentic...

This exercise can be challenging at first and is okay. The mind prefers to keep things simple and disgusting. He won't like it when you make your life story fuller, richer, and more authentic by relating to what you witnessed and experienced.

You can go ahead with this exercise as long as you are willing. Every time you add to your life's documentary. a new episode, you'll notice that it's more than the first story your mind gave you. The story will continue to be written while you are alive. The idea is to identify new experiences that your mind initially has. he ignored them. Look for useful

aspects of your past. to guide you through the process of rebuilding your life's documentary.

We propose to end this module with an exercise that could change your relationship with his own past. This exercise will take you back in time to a younger version of yourself – a version that was there before the trauma or the painful moments you are now struggling with related to your own sexual orientation. He will teach you how to be better with yourself and how to integrate into your existence. the old wounds you may have. We are not saying it will be easy. But if you practice it a few times, you will notice that the past loses some of its power to run your life. You can heal yourself. For this exercise you need ten minutes.

EXERCISE 4.6. HOLD THE CHILD IN YOU!

Objective: In order to step freely into the future, it is necessary to accept our past.

- 1. Start by sitting in a comfortable position on an armchair.*
- 2. Then remember ONE THING YOU HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING WITH FOR A LONG TIME about your sexual orientation. Try to put yourself in that situation. Where were you? What's the matter? What were you doing? What did those around you say or do? Look at it like a big screen in the cinema. Notice how you reacted then. And notice how you react now when you face these memories.*
- 3. Slow down the pace of events... and notice thoughts as thoughts, images as images, physiological sensations as physiological sensations, emotions as emotions... as i am. Look at and notice parts of your experience. as they come and go... Take the view of the chessboard, the impartial observer. You just have to observe. You don't have to be on anyone's side... just stay present in this experience.*
- 4. WHEN YOU ARE READY, RELEASE THAT DIFFICULT IMAGE BY EXHALING DEEPLY AND THEN IMAGINE A MORE SPECIAL MOMENT IN YOUR LIFE . Go back as long as you can remember. at a time in your childhood when you felt good. See if you can view the young version of yourself. Notice your face and eyes as a child, your hair, what you wear and how small you were. Notice where you are, what you were doing, what made you feel more complete?*
- 5. Now imagine that that young version would stand in front of you. now and wants to come into your arms. That version has no idea what the future holds. Just you you know, because you. you have already gone through these experiences.*

6. As you hold tight your younger version, take a moment and look into each other's soul. As you look at, what advice would you share with him or her, knowing that that version will live your life? What does that child need from you? What does he need to hear from you?

7. Stay a little with this thought. When you are ready, gently return to the present moment and try to look with gentleness and kindness at the experiences and all the old wounds you remember. Listen to the words you have shared with yourself, the one in the past. Feel any bit of kindness and compassion from the younger version and take them into your own behavior.

8. As this exercise approaches the end, do one last gesture of kindness with both hands. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Let them relax there in time you surround yourself with kindness. Stay in this position as long as you want.

9. When you are ready, open your eyes (with or without tears, it does not matter). Just return to the present, with the intention of bringing good to yourself, your history, old wounds, but also to your life from now on.

Describe how this exercise helped you.

Here's Michael's example: *I knew I had to do something like that once and for all: Peace with myself, with the past, with what I once was, and with what I now have. And transfer some things from that version to the present version. It was the most intense exercise, even hard. Shattering of emotion. I will visit the place where those memories were. It worked exceptionally. Thanks.*

This exercise can be exciting. You may have noticed that you have been moved. You may also notice a feeling of numbness or strain, as it was difficult for you to give yourself kindness, as you offered your version from the past.

But the most important thing is that you were there before the negative experiences of the past and that you have the power to change the relationship with your past. You can choose to open your memories in a better, more peaceful and loving way. You have the ability to do that.

This is the best time to take control of the life you want. The past is behind. It is not at all useful to continue to put salt on your wounds. Listen to the words you shared with your version. younger. There is wisdom in those words. There you will find your heart.

Our nervous system does not have a delete button (it does not have the Delete key). This means that all of our memories will remain there, being associated with various other aspects. What we can do is just add new ingredients to our memories. For example, we could add acceptance, compassion, and forgiveness to them.

In conclusion, the past is the past and we cannot change it. We were there then, and we are here now. We cannot change what happened, but we can learn from those events how to build meaningful lives.

Homework

1. Practice the meditation exercise.
2. Exercise the observer self's perspective when you are angry or scared.
3. Practice the exercise "squeeze the child in you!" when the past does not give you peace. The past is past and cannot be changed. It can be accepted instead. Make peace with him so that you can anchor yourself in the present, to live a life full of meaning!

The past is the past and it cannot be changed. It can be accepted instead. Make peace with it so that you can anchor yourself in the present, to live a life full of meaning!

MODULE 3 - COMING OUT AND ACCEPTANCE (The acceptance process)

*“Water is fluid and flexible, but it has always moved stones, although they are rigid and strong. As a rule, everything that is fluid and flexible overcomes what is hard and rigid.”
(Lao Tzu)*

Objectives of this module:

- To explore the coming out process. To differentiate passive acceptance from conscious, active and vital acceptance;
- To act with kindness and compassion when faced with minority stress and anxiety related to sexual orientation;
- To let us accept discomfort as a part of life and not as an obstacle between us and our own life;
- To live anchored in the present.

During the previous module we saw that by stopping struggling with worries, anxieties and worries and living anchored in the present, we can regain the freedom to grow and develop. Anxiety and stress can be monsters that paralyze our lives or just temporary experiences that come and go. It all depends on how we choose to act.

In this module, we will explore the coming out process together, see what its main stages are and to what extent you have so far managed to embrace your own sexual orientation. We will also learn how to approach our own lives, replacing unproductive efforts to remove what scares us and worries us with conscious acceptance of our own sexuality, emotions and life events. As we will go through this module and perform the exercises, try to internalize the notion of conscious acceptance and we will understand its vital importance.

THE COMING OUT PROCESS

The coming out process refers to the steps necessary for a person (LGBTQIA+) to recognize and integrate their own sexual orientation. This also includes the process of revealing sexual orientation toward other people. The term IN THE CLOSET refers to the secret preservation of sexual orientation, the effort to maintain confidentiality about sexual orientation in one or more social environments (e.g., hometown/village, acquaintances with religious concerns, etc.).

In the literature, several models or routes have been proposed that people can follow when they want to be open. OUT) about their sexual orientation. But practical experience has proven that this complex PATH of COMING OUT is difficult to fit into a single or general model, that cultural and social factors influence it, that it changes from one period to the next. For those interested, we propose to take a look at Coleman's coming out Stadium model.

IT'S ABOUT YOUR OWN SEXUALITY

When we think about any aspect of life, whether it's our inner world or events that take place outside of us, we tend to do so from a certain perspective. In other words, we tend to look at things from a certain angle, to have a certain attitude toward him. For example, some people are very satisfied with their physical appearance, expressing an attitude of acceptance of their own body; while others are dissatisfied with their body and often have critical comments about it.

The attitude or the way we relate to different aspects of our lives, especially when these aspects are central to the way we build our lives, is one of the keys that can lead us to success. The main challenge this week is how you relate to your own sexual orientation. What attitude do you have toward this aspect of your life? To what extent do you accept your sexuality? How do you feel when you think you are lesbian, gay or bisexual? To what

extent have you been able to embrace (in the private space and in the public space) your sexual orientation?

In this module we will further detail the acceptance process we started talking about last week. We encourage you when it comes to acceptance to think about your sexual orientation, how you feel about this thing, what you can do to develop an attitude of acceptance of your own sexuality.

WHAT IS CONSCIOUS ACCEPTANCE?

Most people think acceptance means to resign yourself or tolerate negative things and as a result, let yourself be overwhelmed by fear, regret and pain. They believe acceptance is a form of renunciation and don't make any effort to change it. This is passive acceptance, a hidden form of non-acceptance in which the person no longer controls even controllable things and allows himself to be driven by anxiety, fears and worries. Like the struggle to control anxiety, passive acceptance is not the solution to stepping into a meaningful life.

Literally, "to accept" means "to agree with what is given to you." In this module we propose the exploitation of another facet of acceptance, which implies the willingness to take things as they are, in their totality, without avoiding them and living anchored in the present. This conscious acceptance will allow us to actively respond to our emotions (by living them without judging them), to feel the vitality of our moments, to become gentle and loving with ourselves, "embracing the storms" in the fullness of our consciousness. Conscious acceptance is an essential skill that allows us to visualize conflicts without judging them, to feel pain without being overwhelmed by it, to respect suffering without merging with it.

In the introductory quote, Lao Tzu teaches that everything that is gentle and malleable is stronger than what is rigid and hard. Allow this message to guide you, for it can be a powerful antidote to it stress. It may seem difficult to put this message into practice, because the mind, which always accompanies us, can resist. Our mind is often

rigid and unable to go beyond judgment, but fortunately, we are much more than what our mind shapes. It is in our power to change the way we act: Instead of reacting harshly, we can show gentleness; instead of letting ourselves be crushed by past suffering, we can attach importance to the things of the present; instead of running away from what brings us negative emotions, we can choose to turn our faces to them and live life in its fullness.

When we think about stress, anxiety and worries about the relationship people have with them, it is possible that the first words that come to mind are hard and inflexible (like rocks). If our reactions will be hard and inflexible, it means we have entered into a game that we will not win: The one in which the rocks try to move one another. Taking up the idea of the introductory quote, let us remember what has always happened, namely that the rocks are shaken and eroded by water rather than by other rocks. In other words, it is beneficial for us to change the resistance and critical judgments (hard, heavy and oppressive) with conscious acceptance, which is active, gentle and fluid, having the unshakable force of a stream of water digging into the rock.

THE EXERCISE 2.1. ANXIETY, BETWEEN HARDNESS AND COMPASSION
The goal of the exercise is to gain a new perspective on anxiety, fears and worries.
<i>Write down in the space below all the words that go through your mind about the anxiety, fears and worries you face when you think about your sexuality.</i>
<i>At first it was hard for me to admit to myself that I was gay, it was something foreign and familiar at the same time. But the hardest thing was to talk about it with my family. I thought he would deny me, I was afraid of their reaction. Over time, I began to get used to any reaction of others when I first heard about my sexual orientation.</i>
<i>Read every word, one at a time, first with gentleness, then with kindness, with openness, with love, with humor, with care and curiosity. Note, after you have done the exercise, what impact these words have on you. Has anything changed after you read them repeatedly as directed?</i>
<i>I give myself gentleness and kindness. I take more out of the tank when I have suffered an attack in public and in the family on my sexuality. They also give them openness and gentleness. I can't expect everyone to understand, I assume there can be a 'shitty' spectrum reaction, and so I return to inner peace and to the divine and pure energy that I can extract from this physical world.</i>

EX 3.1. ANXIETY, BETWEEN HARDNESS AND COMPASSION – Marcel's example

Anxiety and my concerns about my sexual orientation are: unpleasant, paralyzing, intense, painful, burdensome, like a wall, like a knife, dizzying, tiring, shameful, disturbing.

After reading the words written with gentleness, then with kindness, compassion, openness, care, and curiosity, Marcel felt that they had lost their consistency and the emotions associated with them had decreased in intensity.

Don't worry if you haven't noticed any changes. The role of this exercise is to reveal that we have the ability to choose to relate to anxiety and stress in an active and beneficial way. It doesn't mean that we will succeed after the first attempt, but by exercising the fluid and flexible perspective of conscious acceptance, we will acquire new skills that will improve our lives in unsuspected ways. We cannot control everything that happens to us. But we can give ourselves the chance to look at things in a new light, to open ourselves to new experiences. Thus we will see that emotional pain does not lie between us and our life, it is a part of our life.

Active and full acceptance gives us a new beginning, gives us space to control things that can be controlled, and find new solutions to the problems we have been facing for a long time. The mind is welcome in the exercises of acceptance, because judgments are not our enemies. The real enemy is the lock in thoughts and images, the identification with them, the constant struggle to remove them, the abandonment of the really important things that give meaning to life.

EXERCISE 3.2. THE CHINESE FINGER TRAP

You may remember from your childhood the "Chinese finger trap" toy. It is a tube made of braided straw, with a diameter suitable for the index finger. If you put the index fingers of both hands into the tube, each at one end and try to pull them back, the tube narrows and squeezes your fingers. The tube is very durable and you can't pull them out, no matter how hard you pull. The more you shoot, the greater the pressure and pain will be. Instead, if you push your

fingers into the tube, you will create enough space for movement and you can free yourself. Sometimes life seems to trap us and we feel trapped, just like our fingers in the Chinese trap. We struggle hard to evade ourselves, to manage multiple issues that create discomfort, we resist and notice the opposite that the effect is not expected, but everything becomes more pressing and we feel short-circuited (like fingers in the trap, when we fight to release them). The more we struggle, the more limited our movements. By acting the other way, by giving up unnecessary struggles, we will create space to manifest our freedom to make new choices. Briefly describe a situation in which you felt that life had set you a trap. Specify how you acted and what the results were.

The “Chinese finger trap” shows us that the solutions we find instinctively (e.g., fighting, avoiding, the need to remove what is painful) for psychological suffering do not have the desired results. On the contrary, they can aggravate the situation. Therefore, when faced with anxiety, fears and worries, we must act differently and unexpectedly to achieve the desired results. In our case, instead of struggling to get rid of anxiety, fears and worries, we could allow them to exist without trying to make them disappear, which will give us the space to continue our lives.

Switch from struggle or passive acceptance to conscious acceptance - active, gentle, and vital - it can be a long-term process that requires sustained efforts. In order to practice this kind of acceptance, it is essential to be very clear to us what this is all about:

Conscious acceptance means paying attention to the present moment, intentionally, without judging.

Choosing to pay attention to the moment we are in without judgment can be extremely challenging. We must be aware that our attention can be distracted by both the world around us and our own mind, through critical thoughts and judgments that place us

in the past or future and divert our attention from the present moment. To pay attention is to come into contact with our being, with the life force, as they are at the moment we are.

Paying attention is our choice. In other words, we must “take the reins” and observe with gentle curiosity what is happening in the moment we are living now.

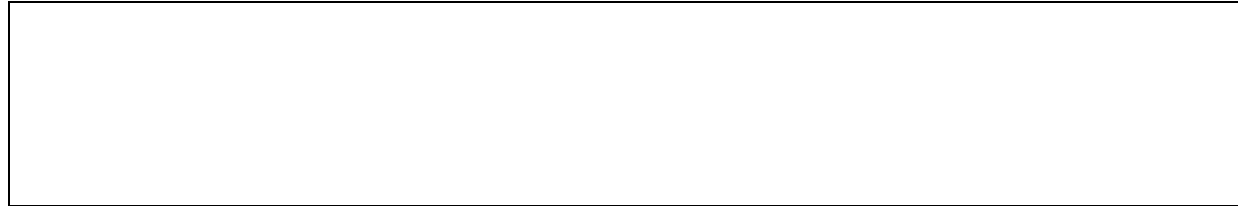
All people live here and now, but the mind can easily take us somewhere else. We all know the phrase “I have my mind somewhere else”, which shows that we can be miles away from the real and important experiences that are currently happening in our lives.

Not judging can be the biggest challenge for some people. This skill will be learned step by step in a longer time. Every day we make dozens of judgments out loud or in our minds (“How horrible!”, “I’m not made for that.”, “How stupid!”, “I’m not normal!”, etc.). They support us in our struggle with anxiety, but we noticed in the previous module that this struggle comes with enormous costs and with too few benefits. On the contrary, some judgments urge us to give up the fight and passively accept everything that happens, which leads to similar results. The problem is not that we judge ourselves, but that we allow ourselves to be caught up in our judgments and let them lead our actions.

EXERCISE 3.3. LIVE IN THE PRESENT!

The purpose of the exercise: Observing thoughts and emotions.

1. Sit in a comfortable position, as in the centering exercise in the first module.
 2. focus your attention on breathing, the movement of lifting and lowering the chest. Feel the rhythm of your breath and the temperature of the inspired and exhaled air.
 3. Sooner or later, your mind will take your attention away from other worries, plans, dreams - thoughts, images, sensations.
 4. When they become quite intense, try to attach them, imaginatively, a note, through which to label them. For example, if you notice that your mind is insisting on a picture from the past, when someone made a mean remark about your sexual orientation, or the experience you had when you last visited your family, you can add the label “memory” to it. You can put the label “worry” on a picture built into your mind for a possible problem. Other labels can be: “Sensations” (tummy pain, tingling, sweating, etc.), “assessments” (thoughts like “boring”, “dangerous”, etc.) “strange,” etc.).
 5. Observe how thoughts and sensations come and go. You can view labels that rise and disappear into the nothingness, like lanterns in the vastness of the sky. What remains here and now is the breath.
- Always return to what accompanies you in the present moment: BREATHING. Focus on it, use it as an anchor to stay in the present.
- Make a note of some impressions following this exercise.



Everything we do happens in the present moment. Thoughts, memories, sensations, we all experience now and here. Life is now and here. The present moment is the only moment in which we can act.

It is easier to stay in the present moment when it does not involve experiencing negative emotions. The real challenge comes when the existential present presupposes a multitude of uncomfortable emotions.

CHANGE THE RADIO STATION!

In order to feel truly free, it is important to know that we can choose which things to pay attention to, and how we will relate to them. For sure, at home or in the car you listen to the radio and you have your favorite stations or shows. You've noticed how you press the device buttons to find what you're looking for, switch stations when you're bored listening to the same news, ads, or songs repeatedly. Just like on the radio, we have the power to choose what to listen to. We can stay connected to. FM anxiety” or “homophobic radio” which transmits live from our mind, listening over and over, becoming dependent on these transmissions, or we can change the “fasting” by choosing to live life in the present moment with all that it has to offer.

Amalia said, in a compassionate and humorous form, the “transmissions” of her own anxiety radio.

EXERCISE 3.5 CHANGES THE RADIO STATION! The example of Amalia

The purpose of the exercise is to exercise acceptance through conscious choice.

Write what you hear when you listen to your own FM anxiety station.

Here is the message that Amalia receives daily on the channel “Anxiety FM”:
 “Well, I found you on the ‘FM anxiety’ news, the news that controls your life, streamed live from your mind. Every morning, when you wake up, your fears and worries await you to show you all the unpleasant aspects of life, even before you get out of bed. Do not try to change the station. We will increase the volume and broadcast on other frequencies. So, do as before: Listen to what your anxiety tells you! Rather than get out of bed and act, accepting life with good and bad, you better stay safe – spectator of life – listening endlessly to this post.”

Change station. Which post did you choose to listen to? What does it convey?

Change the station. Which post did you choose to listen to? What does it convey?

Amalia also wrote what she heard when she switched radio, switching to the full consciousness of life channel.

“The Awakening! You can choose to listen to us. We present current news, things that are happening HERE and NOW. We offer you honesty and unbiased comments about what your life is like. NOW. Our mission is to connect you with the world around you, but also with your world. inside, as you move toward what you really want out of life.”

EXERCISE 3.5 CHANGES THE RADIO STATION!

The purpose of the exercise is to exercise acceptance through conscious choice.

Write down what you hear when you listen to your own homophobic radio station.

Change station. Which post did you choose to listen to? What does it convey?

An essential component of full consciousness is accepting your body and training it to maintain its vitality despite physical and psychological discomfort. In order to come to accept events, thoughts and emotions, and to follow the path drawn by our own values, we must begin by accepting ourselves as living human beings a unique combination of muscles, bones and organs arranged in a functional system: Our body. The process of accepting oneself begins with accepting one's own body.

EXERCISE 3.6 LET THE MIRROR SPEAK!

The purpose of the exercise is to accept yourself

This exercise involves looking at your own image in a mirror in which you can see your entire body for five minutes. To make a stronger impact, you should be like yourself. be completely naked.

Focus your attention on your head and face. Look at the top of your head - hair and skin. Observe the texture, shape and colors. Then, look gently toward your face and focus your attention on your eyes, nose, mouth and cheeks. Look and ask yourself, what would you like to do with your eyes, ears and lips? What would you like to see, hear, feel?

Then move your attention to the area under your chin. Observe your neck, shoulders, chest, belly, and each hand individually. Pay attention to the color, texture, shape, contour and sensations that each area of the body exudes. What does the mirror tell you about your body?

Continue by observing your feet and fingers.

How do you assess the level of discomfort? (Describe your emotions in short.)

In the beginning:

In the end:

It is possible that as we observe our body, the level of discomfort increases. The idea of the exercise is for us to become aware that all life is actually a cohabitation with ourselves, the only person who will never leave us. This partnership can create significant discomfort, which we must accept and with which we must move toward what we want. In other words, “feeling good in our own skin” is a necessary condition to actively and gently accept what life offers us and to act in accordance with our aspirations and dreams.

Consciously experiencing bodily sensations, especially those that create discomfort, allows us to get used to the idea that moving forward in the desired direction means always carrying a larger or smaller bag of discomfort with us. The next exercise shows us that we can integrate a dose of discomfort into our existence without it taking over the counter over our own actions.

EXERCISE 3.7 BODY DISCOMFORT SHEET					
The purpose of the exercise: Exercise flexibility and awareness of body discomfort.					
<i>For each of the actions below, give notes from 0 to 10 (where 0 = lack of any discomfort and 10 = most intense discomfort) for each of the discomfort components shown in the table.</i>					
<i>On the last line, write an action that is important to you, but which causes you discomfort and DO It! Then assess the level of discomfort, as before.</i>					
Action	Intensity of sensation (0-10)	Anxiety level (0-10)	The desire to experiment (0-10)	Difficulties while experimenting (0-10)	Avoidance of experimenting (0-10)
Looking in a specific direction					
Swirling					
Shaking head					
Placing head between knees					
Running on the spot					
Climbing stairs					

We can use the body discomfort sheet to observe our own reactions and to record progress in how we act in situations that are important to us. Awareness of physiological and emotional reactions gives us clues about our strengths and weaknesses, about the

aspects we still have to work on. It is also another way of accepting one's own person in full dignity.

It is known that physical movement increases the brain's ability to release endorphins ("happiness molecules"), which leads to enhanced well-being. That is why it is important to practice the right exercise daily, depending on your health.

THE MIND – FRIEND OR ENEMY?

Conscious acceptance and anchoring in the present moment depend largely on how we relate to our own mind. It can be a reliable partner in the process of achieving the goals proposed or it can be a strong opponent. Next we will be able to observe how our mind works and how we can use its continuous activity in our favor.

As we know, our mind works incessantly: it produces a continuous stream of thoughts, creates, evaluates, solves problems, helps us make sense of our experiences.

In addition, the mind can create scenarios for future events, and it can "throw" us in the blink of an eye into the past. We can look at our minds from two aspects: As a bearer of love, compassion and kindness, or as a source of anxiety, guilt and lamentation.

Our mind can be our best friend or our worst enemy, it depends on how we relate to our thoughts. We can perceive them for what they are, thoughts – without form and substance, even if sometimes they seem quite real. We can learn to take a step back and look at our mind when it judges or criticizes, realizing that it is a complex organ that simply does this: It produces thoughts, images, judgments and evaluations, and connects the body, experiences, and actions with its shapes. Sometimes this connection has positive results, but in many cases it diverts us from the direction we set ourselves by assuming our own values.

As a rule, when faced with events or emotions that create discomfort, the mind produces a large number of thoughts and images, which the body takes over and translates into unpleasant physiological sensations. We often get caught, like a light prey, in this "spider's web." And the harder we struggle, the more the canvas gathers around us, suffocating and limiting our options.

The following exercise is a simple and effective way to free ourselves from the overwhelming grip of the mind.

EXERCISE 3.8. SAY OUT LOUD WHAT SCARES YOU. The example of Joan

1. Joanna thought of something that scares her and chose a rat.

The moment he thought of the rat and imagined it dirty, among the garbage, making sharp and aggressive sounds. As she thought, she began to sweat, her heart beat harder and harder, a grimace of repulsion and disgust appeared on her face, Ioana even imagining a scene where a rat would enter her house. The thoughts associated with the image of the rat were: "Disease-bearer," "disgusting and aggressive animal," "invader." From one word he had reached a whole scenario that created him a great discomfort

2. She spoke loudly and quickly, for 40 seconds without interruption, the word "rat".

3. Reflecting on this exercise, Joanna found that as she spoke, all the associations formed by the mind disappeared, and the word was revealed to her as it was: A sequence of sounds. He realized that the mind could create, like a terrifying machine, judgments that had nothing to do with the present moment (in which he saw no rats).

EXERCISE 3.8. SAY OUT LOUD WHAT SCARES YOU.

The goal of the exercise is to observe how the mind can turn simple thoughts and images into anxiety, fears, and worries.

1. Choose a word (or phrase) that names a thing that scares you and think about it. Note what your mind tells you about it.

2. Repeat the word aloud as quickly as you can, without interruption, for 40 seconds. Note what you have found about your experiences. about the chosen word.

Repeating aloud words that name things that arouse anxiety, fears and worries in us (e.g., death, illness, loneliness, blood, examination, etc.) can be a very useful way to avoid mind traps, which tend to transport us to other times that are not related to present reality. By practicing this exercise, we will be able to return to the present moment, when the mind lures us “to other lands.”

As a variation, you can repeat the word that scares you by putting it on a funny song, maybe even a children's song, which can lessen negative emotions even faster.

We all know people who, by their words or deeds, disturb us, frighten us, or reveal the “worst in us.” Sometimes the mind is like these people, teasing us, even tormenting us, feeding us anxiety, fears and worries. The next exercise teaches us not to be overwhelmed by the things that feed our minds.

EXERCISE 3.9. PERSONIFY YOUR MIND!

The purpose of the exercise is to delimit one’s own person from the mind.

Try to visualize your mind. when you feel negative emotions. Look like a person. What does she look like? Is she caring and loving? Would you like to spend more time in her company and make friends?

Continue to portray, adding details: How old is he? What does it look like? Is it taken care of? Go ahead: How does his voice sound? Write down the description in a maximum of two paragraphs.

EXERCISE 3.9. PERSONIFY YOUR MIND! The example of Larissa.

Larisa, 35 years of age, although she has a successful career, often feels useless, “like a broken toy”, unloved and very scared. In performing this exercise, she represented her mind as a fragile old woman, with a look from the last century, dressed in screaming clothes, fanned with too much red in her cheeks and carrying a few nets in her hand. While the old woman was complaining all the time with a fake voice, she was seen as a false tooth, different from the others. After creating the image, Larisa began to smile. Moreover, she imagined that whenever the old woman opened her mouth to complain, the false tooth flew on the floor. He even chuckled when he found a nickname for him as he wrapped it: “Ludmila senila”. Very quickly, however, Larisa concluded that she would not want to spend too much time in the company of such a character, which made her feel sad and bitter. From that moment on, Larisa began to understand that her mind could produce thoughts and images that had nothing to do with reality, like the old woman with a false tooth. The change of perspective that followed was profound: She looked “from the outside” at her own mind and noticed that it was not necessary to let herself be overwhelmed by all that it produced. A very important aspect is that Larisa began to feel compassion for the character she created and began to look with kindness and kindness even unpleasant thoughts, images or emotions. This exercise reminded Larisa that she had the freedom to choose between going ahead and being trapped in the “mind trap.”

Abstract: The message of this in order to come to integrate into our identity the aspects of sexual orientation has take a first step forward – we have to accept who we are and even to embrace our own sexuality. It would be good if we found a way in which to accept the discomfort created by the judgments of your own mind. It would be good to we focus on the important moments of our lives, moments that are here and now. If we succeed in this, it means that we are already on the path to release anxiety and anxiety worries.

Through the exercises we have learned that in order to free ourselves from unpleasant emotions we should not fight and we should not leave our actions under the command of impulses. We have to act in reverse than we were used to: To accept the discomfort of the present moment, to start creating space for what is really important: for our conscious actions that lead us to a meaningful life.

Let's look at ourselves as fish that swim. It is natural for fish to swim in the water. They don't know they're in the water, they just swim. Thoughts are our water, and we are often so immersed in thoughts that we don't realize their presence, we just "swim in them" randomly, without any direction. Unlike fish, we have the ability to observe our thoughts, to realize that we are immersed in them, and to develop our ability to swim in the direction of our values.

Homework

For this week, we suggest you continue to practice the following exercises:

- "Say out loud what scares you."
- "Change the radio!"
- "Live in the moment!"
- Try to practice the exercises you have learned so far when you feel overwhelmed by anxiety, fears and worries.
- Answer the following question: Do you feel ready to accept the painful impulses, thoughts, and memories as they come? Can you let them go as they came? Are you ready to respond to suffering and pain with gentleness, kindness and compassion? Can you make space for the really important things?

The place where we can live authentically is HERE.

The time to be happy is NOW.

"Stop escaping from the present and you will get where you want to go. Stop struggling in search and you will be revealed the things you want. Stop running and you will find yourself."

(Lao Tzu)

MODULE 4 - IDENTIFY YOUR VALUES (VALUES)

“Regardless of what you do, problems and pain are to be encountered in life. Therefore, your choice is not about being stressed or not, nor about being anxious or not. Your choice is about having a life with or without meaning.” (S.C. Hayes)

Objectives for this module:

- To regain control of your own life.
- To identify the important domains of your life.
- To (re)construct your personal value system (including your sexual identity)
- To find ways of acting towards the direction of your chosen values.

In the previous module you were presented with practical ways of acceptance and anchoring in the present (moment). You have also learned, through the suggested exercises, that people cannot control the way in which they think or feel, but they can instead control the way in which they relate to their thoughts and emotions. It is useful to know that pain is an important part of life and that when we seek to eliminate it, we are losing a great part of our own existence. Each impediment can be transformed into a learning experience. Acceptance, gentleness, compassion, self-kindness alongside your system of values, will offer you the possibility to cohabit with life and its stress, to better cope with concerns and anxiety and to diminish their significance.

THE VALUES OF THE LGBT COMMUNITY

As you might already know, the minority stress represents an additional challenge for the LGBT community and could negatively interfere with the sense of wellbeing of its members from a very young age. But because of these challenges the LGBT+ people had to develop

a series of coping mechanisms. In other words, the obstacles encountered on the way forced the members of the community to rethink their values, to be creative in social and sexual relations, to work for the establishment of the community, to be confident and proud of who they are as individuals. In this module we will focus on what is important in your life as an LGBT+ individual. You are being encouraged to take a few moments to identify the values you hold dear, to articulate your strengths. When you think about what is important to you, perhaps you will have some thoughts about the hopes you had in the past, to get rid of stress, worries and fears. Your mind may still be holding tight to the idea of making the monsters of stress and anxiety go away. Before we go any further, let's look at an example related to this ongoing struggle.

STRESS & ANXIETY

Think of your stress, anxiety, and worry as a pet being a tiger cub. Even though it is just a cub, it is quite scary, and you are frightened that it might bite you. Therefore, go to the fridge and take out a piece of meat for him, in the hope that in this way he won't attack you. Of course, after you feed him, he will leave you alone for a while. But because you are feeding him, he will only grow bigger and scarier, making you feed him more and more often. The problem is that the more frequently you feed him, the bigger and scarier he becomes, forcing you to feed him more and more, in the hope that at some point he will leave you alone. And yet, this predatory animal, formed in our case by stress and worries, does not go away. It's getting bigger and scarier and hungrier, hungrier, and hungrier. And one day, going to the refrigerator, you will see that you have used up all your resources trying to get rid of this "tiger" by feeding it.

Every time you actively struggle with stress, worry and anxiety or any form of emotional discomfort, you are only feeding the tiger, which is getting bigger. In the short term, you won't realize the consequences because the tiger calms down for a while after being fed, but in the long term, it takes over your life.

It is time to face the truth: there is no need to dedicate your life to feeding this tiger! Every time you practice acceptance and self-compassion for your feelings, you will stop feeding this predator. Only then will you be able to see that you have indeed the power to choose a different path for your life.

Have you ever wondered what would your life look like if you did not struggle with stress, anxiety and worries all the time? Think about how you would spend your time if you did not have to constantly avoid people, places or situations that make you uncomfortable. How would you spend your time? What would your interpersonal relationships look like?

EXERCISE 4.1. FEED YOURSELF INSTEAD OF FEEDING THE TIGER

Give yourself some time to do a centering exercise (the one that you learned in the first module). When you feel ready, imagine that you are feeding your own life instead of the tiger (constituted of stress and worries). Think: "This is my own life, the way in which I have always wanted to live." Write down how you envision yourself feeding & nurturing your own life.

Most likely, some of thoughts that passed through your mind were related to those situations that you are now avoiding because of anxiety, fears, worries. We would like you to reconnect with these important parts of your life. These important parts represent your VALUES.

WHAT ARE MY OWN VALUES?

If you haven't spent time to think about this topic for a long time, it might be difficult to answer this question. **When we refer to values, we refer to two aspects: the first one represents what is important to you and only to you. The second aspect is what you**

do to express that this is important. Your actions are the ones that express what you regard as important in your own life.

For example, you might want to be a better life partner. But without action, this desire is just a thought that crosses your mind. If you want this thought to become a value, you need to analyze what you are doing as a life partner. You may ask yourself, “What am I doing to be a good partner? What does this look like, as seen through my actions?”

To answer the question that we invite you to take the time needed to analyze what is important in your life, who you truly want to be. Think about what makes life worth living for you, what do you love, value and what will make you act towards that.

VALUES ARE LIKE A LIGHTHOUSE DURING A STORM

Just as a lighthouse would guide ships during stormy weather, values give us a direction to follow, they guide us to what is important in our lives.

In your case, the storm is represented by minority stress, by anxiety, worries and fears that blur your direction and prevent you from moving forward. Thus, the storm becomes the main concern, making you unable to see the lighthouse that should normally help you position yourself in the direction you wish to go to. Perhaps you feel like having no direction to follow, pushed, sunken right to the bottom of the sea of worries and fears. Everything appears to be hopeless, just as there would be absolutely no way out. And it is (indeed) so if you do not guide yourself by the light provided by the lighthouse.

Values are the beacon that can help you navigate through the storm in your life. There is no need to wait for the storm to stop. You can go forward calmly to the places that are important to you. You already know that anxiety, fears, and worries are like the weather - sometimes strong, sometimes rather weak, surprising, or predictable. Thoughts and emotions are the same. Instead, values do not change as the weather does. They just need to be fed with actions done towards their direction. Once you have the direction given

by your own (set of) values, it will be easier for you to focus your efforts on going forward to the life that you wish to have.

In this very moment, a crucial step is to focus on a beautiful life, instead of focusing on the desire to get rid of stress and anxiety. To regain the life that you wish for yourself, it is necessary to focus on values. This is the motivation to continue with the modules proposed by us. We know that it is not easy to make such a commitment, but we also know that valuable things are also not that easy to obtain.

Life is energy, and this energy is a precious gift. With the help of this program, you will begin to develop your skills of acceptance and of being present in the “here and now”. These skills will help you focus on a life full of meaning, instead of wasting your energy trying to exhaust yourself with anxiety, worries, and stress. Do not forget - it is your own choice how you consume your energy!

Consider your energy resources as being a hammer. With the help of a hammer, you can build something up or you can destroy it. You choose whether you use your energy constructively or destructively. You can continually struggle with anxiety, fears, and worries, or you can focus your energy on being a good lover/ caring partner, a good friend, an active member of the community, an accomplished athlete, a professional, or anything else regarded as important by you.

Values are a vital alternative to fighting against your own worries, anxiety, fears, and excessive control.

Values are not a new form of avoidance or distraction from worries, anxiety, or stress. They offer you a path to follow in life, help you decide what is important, and provide you with a framework in which to consume your energy in the most constructive way possible.

As always, situations that require various decisions will arise. So, you will either try to control the anxiety by moving further and further away from what matters to you, or you will move in the direction of your values alongside the anxiety and stress.

VALUES ARE DIFFERENT FROM GOALS

Most of the time, people who suffer from anxiety find it difficult to identify their values, and this is because barriers consisting of fears and worries appear. Fear and lack of hope can make you think that you have no value in life, but with a little effort you will manage to identify what is of great importance to you.

Let's take an example:

Alex has been struggling with the shame of being LGBT and he entertained exaggerated worries for a long time. He told us: "I no longer care about my social relationships, which are terrible anyway. I no longer have friends or a partner. Anytime I try to make new friends, they seem to avoid me. Every time I go on a date with a potential partner, he does not seem so keen on the idea of having a somewhat-longer relationship with me. I think everyone realizes that I am shy, and I have strange habits".

At first glance, Alex does not seem to be interested in social or intimate relations. But if we analyze further, we will see that he suffers precisely because shame and anxiety stop him from having a partner or making new friends, causing him great pain. And it is this very pain that shows us that social relations are indeed important to Alex.

Maybe it is the same for you. Perhaps the pain or discomfort you feel about specific aspects of your life is a sign that those aspects mean something to you: that you care about them, or even value them. To clarify things, you can ask yourself: "Do I care about this?".

Alex got stuck at formulating values because he formulated them as goals. He thought, "If I act this way, I will obtain that". **Careful! Values are not goals to be achieved.**

A life based on values is more like a journey, rather than a destination. Destinations are just points at which we just pass by, so that we get to give some meaning to our lives. These destinations can bring good, bad, disappointing results, but we are unable to know the results until we get there. But even so it is important to remain aware of the values that guided you in that direction, to understand if you did what was indeed important to you.

What we want to highlight here is that values help you focus your attention on the *here and now*, on the process of living life. If, on the other hand, you choose the values based only on the results obtained from performing the actions, you will wait a long time to feel the result and most likely you will end up being disappointed because things do not turn out as you intended. **When you think about values and goals, listen to your heart, not just your mind.** Often, when people are asked what is important to them, some tell us: "I want to be a good partner" (value), or "I want to go out at least two nights a week with my partner" (goal). However, they do not seem to be too excited or excited. For this reason, we recommend you ask yourself: "How important is this thing to me? Is it truly important to do this or am I just doing it because I should?"

Sometimes, we might choose values that make us look good in the eyes of others, to be what others expect of us (eg: other members of the LGBT+ community). **But our values should help us live our lives the way we want them to, not the way others want us to live them.**

Goals can help us start acting in the direction of our values. But we should also evaluate the vitality of every action we undertake. **Vitality is a benchmark. The more actions we undertake towards the direction of our values, the more energized and alive we will feel.** Sometimes, the steps we take towards our values are more difficult, or they can bring unpleasant emotions, but they remain very important for reaching our goals and getting closer to our values.

Unfortunately, we can easily misjudge goals to values. But the difference between them is clear. Goals are the stones that pave the path to a meaningful life. Goals represent actions that we can put on a list and mark when we have completed them. They can be touched, finished, consumed. Some examples would be: to lose weight, to go to the gym twice a week, to go on a holiday at the seaside, to legally marry my partner.

Values, on the other hand, are the beacon that guides us on the journey of life. Values do not have an endpoint. They just guide us through life.

For example: the goal "to get legally married" is one of the steps we undertake towards the value of being a loving partner. This value of being a devoted and loving partner is not attained at the time of marriage. On the contrary, there is always enough space for more goals to lead a healthier and happier married life.

Values and goals are related to one another. To figure out what our values are, we can ask ourselves: "Why am I doing this?", "What am I actually trying to achieve by doing this?", "Where am I actually going?".

VALUES ARE DIFFERENT TO EMOTIONS

Unlike emotions, which are independent of our will, values are directions we consciously choose to guide us in life. They constitute the essence of our existence; they are what give us strength and vitality and determine us to evolve. Values are qualities of our existence that lay out a meaningful path for us, bringing together in a coherent pattern all the experiences we have, including those related to our sexual identity. Sometimes the choices we make according to our system of values can have as consequence negative emotions (we are discriminated against; we receive hate messages). Many people believe that positive emotions could act as an indicator that they are on the path of their own values. But this could not always be true. The 'path of values' can be thorny and cause fear, worry, anxiety, discrimination or even abuse.

The central idea is that we need to define what truly matters to us and consciously choose to follow the determined direction. All the skills learned in this program can have an effect only if they are used to achieve a life full of meaning, even if the pursuit of values could sometimes bring disadvantages or perhaps exposure to increasing discrimination, or the struggle (which sometimes seems endless and pointless) for the rights of sexual minorities.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF VALUES

All of us have tried to find or achieve happiness through varying methods. Happiness comes when we listen to our heart, and then perform actions that matter in relation to that. To facilitate the proper conditions for happiness, it is necessary to find those things that truly matter to us. You may think that because you are part of the LGBT+ community, you have no values / or you cannot think about them, as you have violated the most important social and religious values. But things are not at all as such. Below you can find some questions that can help you guide yourself toward these values:



"What does truly matter to me in this life?",

"How would I like my life to look like, as an LGBT+ person?"

DIRECTIONS OF VALUE

In this exercise you will find listed 10 domains that people consider valuable to a greater or lesser extent: career, romantic relationships, role as a parent, educational (or academic) development, friends/social life, health, family of origin, spirituality, social community/environment & nature, spare time.

Each domain has its specific importance and gives you a framework in which you are able focus your energy. If you are close to the age of retirement, your focus on the professional area will likely shift to your free time or social relationships. These fields are not values themselves. They are simply areas of life where you can express your values. Perhaps you will notice that in certain domains (e.g.: the parent role or spirituality) might be irrelevant for you at this moment, or that due to your sexual identity it was difficult for you to express them.

The first step is to identify the values. Be mindful! Not all the domains are important to you at this very moment. By knowing the important domains and formulating values, you

can consider the intention to act so that you are able to express these values (optional: in the most optimal way).

Your intentions are being reflected by your own actions or by the way in which you express your values. In fact, intentions are the behaviors that you would like to do so that you express your values in a certain domain. By formulating intentions to act towards the direction of your values you will be able to determine your own priorities. So, to formulate intention based on a (specific) value, we ask you regarding each domain: "How would you want to express this value?". Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers, as each one of us considers and expresses values differently. So that it would be easier for you to decide if a domain is important for you, as well as for you to formulate your values, we offer you a brief description of each domain of life.

1. Career & work

Whether it is about a paid or unpaid position, volunteering or (perhaps) working from home, think about what this domain offers you. It can be about financial security, independence, a challenge of intellectual nature or the ability to help others (in need). Think about your perfect workplace, about the way in which you spend your energy, talent, skills in the most productive way. What would you do if you could do anything? What are the important things that a job can offer you?

2. Intimate relationships

This domain refers to the relationships established with a partner (as a couple). We recommend you think about what exactly you would be able to bring to these relationships (not what the other person would bring to the relationship). What kind of partner would you like to be? What values would you wish to express in your relationship (as a couple)? How would you like to treat the person with whom you share an emotional commitment or connection with?

3. The parental role

Whether you already are a parent, or you consider becoming one, think about the kind of parent you want to be. How would you like to be in this role? How would you like to interact with your child? What is important in this area of life?

4. Personal development & academic education

Personal development refers to your development as a human being, on the emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual, and behavioral dimensions. Furthermore, personal growth can be found in all other life domains, through its ability to provide you with an image of yourself. Personal growth and education go hand in hand as in every moment we are learning new things, developing our abilities, deepening our knowledge. Learning is lifelong! What does personal growth mean to you? Do you want to develop your knowledge or abilities that you already have further, or do you want to acquire (completely) new ones? Do you enjoy learning new things? Do you like to share what you have learned with others? What exactly would you like to learn?

5. Friends & social life

We are all social beings. However, some people prefer to have more social relationships, whilst others only a few, but very close, friends. Some people prefer to have social relationships of different kinds, while others wish to be left alone. What do regard as valuable here? What kind of relationships do you want? What personal qualities do you want to develop through these social relationships? What does it mean to be a good friend? Why do you regard friendship as important? How do you behave with your best friend?

6. Health

Various motivations lie behind people that wish to have a healthy lifestyle. Whether it helps them to be in good physical shape for a (physically-)demanding job, or perhaps because it is important to take care of themselves, or even wish for a long life with their loved ones. Taking care of yourself and your health represents an act of generosity and love towards

yourself, an act that leads to the end of the battle with your own self. Think about what lies behind your motivation to keep your mind and body in the best state.

7. Family of origin

Family of origin refers to parents, siblings, guardians or even step-relatives. What kind of relationships do you want to have with them? Why are these relationships important? What kind of son/daughter do you want to be? What type of brother/sister do you want to be? What can you bring in the relationships with the family of origin?

8. Spirituality

Each one of us has a spiritual side also, regardless of whether it involves a personal religion, or just a desire to relate to others. Think about what inspires you, what you believe in or worship. What values guide your life from this perspective? How would you like to evolve spiritually?

9. Social community, environment & nature

How important is your role in the community that you live in? Do you enjoy being involved in helping other members of your community? What about the environment? Are you interested in recycling, energy conservation, optimizing your water consumption, planting trees, keeping green spaces tidy, combating deforestation?

10. Spare time

Free time is a very important domain as it has a direct effect on the quality of life. The spare time is that time in which we can perform activities that we enjoy (and give us pleasure), in which we focus on creative and entertaining activities. What interests or hobbies do you have? What is it that makes you enjoy these activities so much?

EXERCISE 4.2. MY VALUES

This exercise aims to offer you a better perspective of the important domains in your life. It was designed to help you formulate your values, but also your intentions of value. This exercise might take some time, but we promise that this time will be well spent.

1. The importance of the domain of life. Starting from your life, think about which of these domains are (indeed) important and which are not. Mark an "X" in the box next to each domain that you regard as important. You can mark as important as many domains as you find as being relevant.

2. Assessment of life domain. After you have chosen the important areas, try to rate, on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = totally dissatisfied and 10 = fully satisfied), how satisfied you are with each of the areas currently.

3. Values. Fill up the blanks with the values you have in each area marked as important to you. Take the time you need to reflect on the things that matter. Be aware that values ARE DIFFERENT from goals.

4. Implementational intentions. Try to formulate how you would like to capitalize each life domain that is important for you. Each intention must be personal and meaningful to you. Intentions will help you act in the direction of your values, even when worries, anxiety, and fears get in the way.

Life-Domain	Importance	Assessment	Values	Implementational intentions
1. Career & work				
2. Intimate Relationships				
3. Parental Role				
4. Personal Development				
5. Friends & social life				
6. Health				
7. Family of Origin				
8. Spirituality				
9. Social community, environment & nature				
10. Spare time				

EXERCISE 4.3. Life compass

The previous exercise "My values" is the starting point of this exercise. So, we invite you to check up the compass to see if you are heading towards the desired direction.

1. Actions. Look at the exercise involving the values and notice which life domains you marked as important. Think about whether you have acted in each important domain in the past two weeks and mark the table with an "X" if you have.

2. Frequency of Actions. Please assess the frequency of actions that you performed towards that direction by using (these terms): **Often** (if you acted according to your value), **Sometimes** (if the actions were somewhat towards that direction, but various factors appear that prevent continuous action such as priorities, concerns from other domains or perhaps emotional barriers) or **Not at all** (if you fail to act according to your intentions and values because you have certain barriers).

3. Obstacles. What's in your way? There might be a discrepancy between values and actions due to inner barriers: thoughts, emotions, physiological sensations, or impulses. Analyze these barriers and mark/include them in the table next to the domains where discrepancies appear.

Life-Domanin	Actions	Frequency of the actions	Obstacles
1. Career & work			
2. Intimate Relationships			
3. Parental Role			
4. Personal Development			
5. Friends & social Life			
6. Health			
7. Family of Origin			
8. Spirituality			
9. Social community, environment & nature			
10. Spare time			

Homework for Module 4

For this week we suggest that you continue to exercise to:

- ✓ Accept your thoughts and emotions, at least once a day, using the skills you already master.
- ✓ Try once a day, or at least every other day, to engage in an activity that is related to your values.

When you take a new step towards your values, try to remember the other skills that you have learned in this program such as being mindful, seeing your thought as mere thoughts, or relating to your experiences with kindness.

You can live a meaningful life by letting yourself be guided by your own values! Along this amazing journey, do allow yourself to be accompanied by all your experiences, whatever they might be. The toughest challenges are those created by your own mind! Do not let them stand in your way! Keep an eye on the "compass of life" so that you make sure that you follow the desired direction!

Uphold your



MODULE 5 - STEPS TOWARDS A MEANINGFUL LIFE (COMMITMENT)

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.” (Chinese Proverb)

Objectives for this module:

- Set life goals in accordance with your own value system.
- Be aware of the steps to follow to achieve the objectives.
- Identify internal and external obstacles.
- Accept the obstacles in the journey to a meaningful life.
- Exercise flexibility.

In the previous module you saw that the values we choose give us a direction to follow. They can help us stay focused on the things that really matter. When fear, anxiety, and worry grab our attention, we might stop, notice our thoughts and emotions, and then move forward in the direction of our values. A good life is the result of several actions in the direction of our values. Thus, through the choices and actions we make, we write our epitaph every day. Each day offers us opportunities to act in the direction of our values, giving us the opportunity to take our thoughts and anxieties with us.

Your life's journey is made up of the steps you take in all areas of life, including establishing a mature sexual identity. Each step you take will bring you closer to or away from what is important to you. The solution is to go through each step carefully, because with the help of the steps you will create the necessary conditions for an ideal happiness. We'll call them **smart steps**.

Smart steps are those guided by your own values, which act as a beacon that brings light to the direction of your steps, i.e. casts light on what is most important in life. It is

important to remember the main aspects in the turmoil of stress, anxiety, sadness, and anguish. (Remember the example: "Lighthouse in the storm at sea".)

What is wonderful is that these values give a personalized meaning to life, and people in the LGBT+ community really need to develop or create such personalized sounds for themselves. To live a fulfilled life, we must step forward into the unknown. Be it small or big, every step is essential in achieving your goals, hopes and dreams.

ESTABLISHING AND ACHIEVING GOALS

Remember the "Life Compass" from the previous module. Now it's time to decide which of these values and intentions are more important to you at this point in your life. Choose a value that has created difficulties, perhaps you have postponed this aspect until now due to the barriers created by anxiety or fears of being labeled, judged negatively, or discriminated against.

Being smart means being clever, and in our case, it means adopting wise behavior in achieving goals. George Doran (1986) developed a program consisting of 5 steps to help people achieve their goals. He called them SMART goals, or more simply, intelligent goals. This program was initially developed for people working in the business field, but it has been successfully adopted and used in ACT (Harris, 2008). For purely educational reasons, we have adopted this method and modified it to suit our needs.

Specific - Identifying specific goals you want to achieve.

Measurable - Establishing goals that can be measured.

Active - Choosing goals that you can achieve on your own and that add satisfaction and vitality to your life.

Realistic - Setting reasonable goals based on the circumstances in which you find yourself.

Time-bound - Making a commitment to the proposed goals.

ELABORATE CONCRETE AND REASONABLE OBJECTIVES

Once you start thinking about your life goals, you'll realize that some are short-term and can be achieved in the near future, while others are more complex and will take longer to reach. However, both types of goals are equally important, and achieving one can bring you one step closer to the other.

If you don't set realistic goals based on the context of your life, the process can become complicated and there is a possibility of giving up on your goals. It's very important that the chosen goals are easy to achieve, actions that fit the content of your life.

On a separate sheet of paper, write down a few goals that are directly related to the first value noted in the Compass of Life section. Remember - it's important for these goals to be realistic and easily achievable through your own efforts, without anyone's help. You could write down two goals, one short-term and one long-term.

Then, address the following questions, considering the SMART process:

- Is this goal specific (concrete, practical)?
- Is it measurable (can it be assessed when it was achieved)?
- Is it active (can you achieve this goal on your own and you have control over it)?
- Is it realistic (does it take into account the circumstances of your life at this moment)?
- Is it time-bound (can you write it in your schedule)?

By going through these questions, you can find out if this goal aligns with achieving your values. Does it express what you want, what's important to you? If the answer is yes, then the goal is SMART. If your answer is no, then it's important to revise the goal to be in the same context as your values and life.

IDENTIFYING THE STEPS AND SORT THEM OUT IN A LOGICAL ORDER

Once the goals have been set, the next phase is represented by the path that needs to be taken to achieve them. To begin with, it is recommended to start with short-term goals. Every step counts, which is why you should prioritize them as efficiently and effectively as possible. What needs to happen before each step? If the order of the steps doesn't matter

to you, then start with the easiest step to do. Copy these steps onto the Values and Goals Sheet at the end of the module, in the order in which you need to accomplish them.

We offer you two examples. Let's assume that your goal is to change jobs and advance to a manager position in a corporation. For this goal to be achieved, several actions need to be taken, such as gathering data on what it means to become a manager, what this position entails, updating your resume, applying for the desired corporation and position, and obtaining an interview with the company that interests you. Notice how the order of the steps is very important, in that you are likely not to be called for an interview if you don't update your resume first.

Another example: imagine that you want to spend more time with your life partner. This goal can be achieved with the help of certain steps: planning a pleasurable activity once a week, such as going to the theater, biking or even watching a movie at home. Here, the order of the steps is not as important as simply accomplishing these steps.

COMMITMENT AND STEPS TO BE TAKEN

It's time to renew your commitment to the values and behavioral changes you set at the beginning of the program. Are you willing to fully dedicate yourself to these objectives, regardless of how you may feel physically or mentally in the coming days? If the answer is yes, then begin this process with a first step. Fully commit to these objectives, no matter how you may feel physically or mentally in the coming days. The essential idea is to engage in activities that positively change your life. If you do not act in this direction, no changes will occur.

Record on and the date (calendar day) of each step taken towards achieving the objectives. If it makes you feel better, you can also draw a star. It is very important that you congratulate yourself for your achievements and offer yourself a reward, no matter how small the step was.

Some people take these steps at a faster pace, while others need more time, and there is nothing wrong with that. It doesn't matter how much time you spend taking steps;

what matters is achieving the proposed objective, not getting overwhelmed by barriers, fully dedicating yourself, and moving in the desired direction at your own pace, with patience and persistence.

Next, we invite you to complete this table with your own values and objectives. Since you may be working with more than one value/objective, you can complete multiple forms with Values and Objectives.

EXERCIȚIUL: 5.1. VALUES & OBJECTIVES			
Values:			
Objective:			
Steps towards your goal	Barriers	Strategies	Date (goal achieved)

KNOWING YOUR OWN LIMITS AND BARRIERS

So far, we have worked on discovering the internal barriers that have stood in the way of achieving SMART goals. Now, we will focus on external barriers. These represent another set of obstacles such as lack of money, limited time, reduced skills, or even lack of necessary information to do what is important.

The good news is that no matter what kind of barriers you face, internal or external, it is important to know how to coordinate them and develop a plan to live with them. The following exercise will help you anticipate the barriers and challenges that may arise on your path to achieving SMART goals. Thus, by taking them into account, you can develop a plan that will help you continue your steps.

EXERCISE 5.2. EMOTIONAL BARRIERS – Valentin's example

Purpose: Anticipation of barriers

1. For a moment, close your eyes and remember your values, then notice the things you care about and let yourself be carried by these thoughts. If it's difficult, try to imagine that nothing is standing in your way and you're free to follow your heart, to do those things that are important to you.

2. Now, try to translate these thoughts onto a cinema screen and observe yourself, from the perspective of an impartial observer, doing those things you've only dreamed of. Notice where you are. Notice what you're saying. Notice what you're doing with your hands and feet. And if other people are involved, notice how they react around you. And now, most importantly, notice how you feel inside.

3. Observe what your mind is telling you. Have you discovered any negative thoughts? What are they (e.g. I can't do this...)? Write these thoughts briefly in the space below.

When I think about the future, my mind somewhat tells me that I can achieve my goals, that at some point in life I will be financially capable, that I will be able to visit the Orient and have enough time to do it thoroughly (not just in a rush). Very importantly, I imagine that I will not go anywhere alone, that I will be with my partner, living a sacred love. Regarding this, I have thought that my way of being will help me to achieve these things.

But I must admit that the idea of failure also arises (and not just once). I would like to believe that in the case of failure, I will be strong enough to remain content with who I am. But I doubt that too. And sometimes it seems to me that I am overly optimistic.

Or discouraging thoughts like "Nothing matters anymore...so don't stress about it...". What are these?

All of them were under the condition that I manage to keep my anxiety under control. Otherwise, it would probably have a domino effect. I have felt this discouragement, that I will end up back at the beginning.

Now, focus your attention on your body. What do you feel? If it's hard for you to tell, try to notice any physiological changes (e.g. tension). If you've noticed any physiological sensations in your body (e.g. tension, palpitations, jerky breathing), don't do anything about it, just feel and observe these sensations. Be like a "chessboard".

Now, listen to what your mind is telling you. Is it telling you to run away, to give up? After this moment, slowly return to your initial state. Take note of any barriers that are in your way.

My heart is beating faster, and I feel like I have something in my throat. I exhale more loudly. My mind is telling me to just calm down, and maybe even to sleep a little.

Next, we invite you to complete the exercise using your own experience:

EXERCISE 5.2. EMOTIONAL BARRIERS
Purpose: Anticipation of barriers
<p><i>1. For a moment, close your eyes and remember your values, then notice the things you care about and let yourself be carried by these thoughts. If it's difficult, try to imagine that nothing is standing in your way and you're free to follow your heart, to do those things that are important to you.</i></p> <p><i>2. Now, try to translate these thoughts onto a cinema screen and observe yourself, from the perspective of an impartial observer, doing those things you've only dreamed of. Notice where you are. Notice what you're saying. Notice what you're doing with your hands and feet. And if other people are involved, notice how they react around you. And now, most importantly, notice how you feel inside.</i></p> <p><i>3. Observe what your mind is telling you. Have you discovered any negative thoughts? What are they (e.g. I can't do this...)? Write these thoughts briefly in the space below.</i></p>
<i>Or discouraging thoughts like "Nothing matters anymore...so don't stress about it...". What are these?</i>
<p><i>Now, focus your attention on your body. What do you feel? If it's hard for you to tell, try to notice any physiological changes (e.g. tension). If you've noticed any physiological sensations in your body (e.g. tension, palpitations, jerky breathing), don't do anything about it, just feel and observe these sensations. Be like a "chessboard".</i></p> <p><i>Now, listen to what your mind is telling you. Is it telling you to run away, to give up? After this moment, slowly return to your initial state. Take note of any barriers that are in your way.</i></p>

THE REWARDS AND CHALLENGES OF LIVING A MEANINGFUL LIFE

Next, we propose some exercises that will help you visualize the features of a fulfilled, meaningful life.

EXERCISE 5.3. A SIGNIFICANT LIFE – Valentin's example
Purpose: To recognize the rewards of a meaningful life
<p><i>1. Close your eyes and breathe deeply until you achieve a state of inner calm.</i></p> <p><i>2. Now, recall a value from your list of values. Imagine that you can act to fulfill it, without facing any difficulties, barriers, and your efforts are successful.</i></p> <p><i>3. In this exercise, observe your actions carefully and allow yourself to be enveloped by the sweetness of this moment, as if you were watching a sunset. How does success appear or feel inside you? Write your answer in the space below.</i></p>
<p><i>It feels very harmonious, I don't know how to describe it. It settles gradually, layer by layer of self-satisfaction somehow. Warmth and light.</i></p>
<p><i>4. Do you notice any particular thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations? Describe them briefly.</i></p>
<p><i>I feel grateful for my own success, happiness. I had a sensation of warmth throughout my body, as if I emitted a warm light from within.</i></p>
<p><i>5. Stay with this image and when you are ready, redirect your attention to the surrounding world - people, events, and the environment in which you find yourself in this scenario. What is different?</i></p>
<p><i>Honestly, I didn't feel much different. I think this sub-point didn't work well for me because I have had a lot of contact with therapy, and it was deeply ingrained in me that I cannot be happy as long as I consider the opinions of others. I also reached the point where I saw that even parents can prioritize their own happiness over their child's.</i></p>
<p><i>6. Try to notice how people around you react to you and your accomplishments. How do you feel now, without barriers and achieving things you only dreamed of?</i></p>
<p><i>People around me may blame me, consider me crazy, and point fingers, but those people don't know my life story, who I truly am, and they don't truly understand my dreams. I feel invincible and can enjoy my successes as a human being, knowing that I have not harmed anyone, but simply have been immune to the lack of understanding that others show me. I guess, to some extent, I have learned to stand up for myself in front of others.</i></p>

Once again, we invite you to complete the exercise using your own experience:

EXERCISE 5.3. A SIGNIFICANT LIFE

Purpose: To recognize the rewards of a meaningful life

1. *Close your eyes and breathe deeply until you achieve a state of inner calm.*
2. *Now, recall a value from your list of values. Imagine that you can act to fulfill it, without facing any difficulties, barriers, and your efforts are successful.*
3. *In this exercise, observe your actions carefully and allow yourself to be enveloped by the sweetness of this moment, as if you were watching a sunset. How does success appear or feel inside you? Write your answer in the space below.*

4. *Do you notice any particular thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations? Describe them briefly.*

5. *Stay with this image and when you are ready, redirect your attention to the surrounding world - people, events, and the environment in which you find yourself in this scenario. What is different?*

6. *Try to notice how people around you react to you and your accomplishments. How do you feel now, without barriers and achieving things you only dreamed of?*

EXERCISE 5.4. CREATING A SUCCESSFUL STORY – Valentin's example

Purpose: Observing change in life

1. Adopt a comfortable position and take a deep breath. Close your eyes slowly. When you feel ready, think of a very important value that you cannot express due to fear or anxiety. Imagine taking the first step towards this value. What is the first thing you would say?

I would tell myself that as long as I don't start fighting to achieve that ideal/value in the true sense, it's useless to think about it and aspire to it. Everything will be in vain, and all I will do is keep myself captive within myself. And I think this will make me come out of my shell.

2. Try to observe each movement as if you were watching yourself on a huge screen. Notice the movements and hear the words.

3. Observe and hear how others respond to your actions. What do the people around you say and do?

The people in the collective I live in and was raised in will blame me. I can almost hear them whispering behind my back already. They will think I'm crazy for not conforming to their reality, they will try to penetrate my privacy and basically try to bring me down. This is because, in a way, I will surpass that average level and will come out of this crowd that just limits everything. Yes, I won't be completely insensitive, it will affect me to some extent, but I'm convinced that this will no longer be able to make me deviate from my principles.

4. Try to be aware of the inner barriers that arise. Identify the emotions that seem to block your path, that do not allow you to take steps towards fulfilling the value. Identify the thoughts that weigh you down. Do you experience any physical sensations that create discomfort? Continue to observe your thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations without resistance. No matter how frightening these images may be, observe them with an open mind, allow them to unleash and remember that, although they increase rapidly in intensity, they will also decrease rapidly and eventually disappear. Don't forget to be kind to your own thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations.

5. Returning to the image in which you act in favor of the chosen value, try to imagine how you achieve your goal in the end. Let yourself be overwhelmed by the moment when you have succeeded in fulfilling what you have set out to do. Recognize that you have accomplished something wonderful for your life, overcoming emotional barriers.

Yes, it would be a special joy, I have experienced this before. That warmth and genuine smile, all for the courage to take the bull by the horns and fight with myself. It's wonderful and I think, following all the efforts, I am lucky enough to experience such joys (more than the vast majority of people). But I have had to fight a lot, with myself and with others, to get here.

EXERCISE 5.4. CREATING A SUCCESSFUL STORY

Purpose: Observing change in life

1. Adopt a comfortable position and take a deep breath. Close your eyes slowly. When you feel ready, think of a very important value that you cannot express due to fear or anxiety. Imagine taking the first step towards this value. What is the first thing you would say?

2. Try to observe each movement as if you were watching yourself on a huge screen. Notice the movements and hear the words.

3. Observe and hear how others respond to your actions. What do the people around you say and do?

4. Try to be aware of the inner barriers that arise. Identify the emotions that seem to block your path, that do not allow you to take steps towards fulfilling the value. Identify the thoughts that weigh you down. Do you experience any physical sensations that create discomfort? Continue to observe your thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations without resistance. No matter how frightening these images may be, observe them with an open mind, allow them to unleash and remember that, although they increase rapidly in intensity, they will also decrease rapidly and eventually disappear. Don't forget to be kind to your own thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations.

5. Returning to the image in which you act in favor of the chosen value, try to imagine how you achieve your goal in the end. Let yourself be overwhelmed by the moment when you have succeeded in fulfilling what you have set out to do. Recognize that you have accomplished something wonderful for your life, overcoming emotional barriers.

Remember, a significant life is built on SMART goals. Each day is an opportunity to act towards achieving those goals. If you don't stay committed to your commitments, you'll end up back where you started, over and over again, until you reach your goals.

Your choices and actions determine what happens with the barriers on the path towards a meaningful LGBT+ life. When you feel like you're going to fail, you have a choice. Will you be defeated or will you learn from your experience and move forward?

ACCEPT THE EMOTIONAL BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES!

Remember that it is not necessary to break through emotional barriers. It is not necessary to eliminate them. You also do not have to change them. What is important is to acknowledge their presence and accept them on your journey. Let your values show you the way. Do not allow negative emotions to stop you from taking action and be kind to yourself.

Try to change your relationship with your mind, body, sexuality, spirit, and life as a whole that you have in this moment. You are the only pilot of your own life. To have the life you dream of, you must remain firmly in the position of the pilot and transport the passengers in your life, whether they are pleasant or unpleasant. When in doubt, the best advice would be to stop listening to the "hate radio" and change the frequency and look at it from the perspective of an impartial observer. Try to be gentle with yourself throughout this process. By nurturing positive feelings, friendship, and goodwill towards your own sexual orientation, it will become easier to travel with stress and anxiety. Negative emotions are not enemies. They are more like a hurt child who needs love. Take care of this child.

DO NOT FALL INTO THE TRAPS OF THE MIND!

Your mind will not stop inventing unpleasant aspects, remembering hate messages, or the discrimination you may have suffered as an LGBT+ person just because you have decided to commit to your own values. There will be moments when you will feel the need to take a break and face difficulties, and your mind will judge you: "The only thing you should accept is that you are a disaster in the process of acceptance and commitment!". When

the mind plays like this, do not let it influence you, it is just an example of what it can do, but in a negative sense.

Ask yourself if what your mind is telling you can really be in your best interest, or are they just thoughts and memories that unsettle and cause discomfort. These are the moments when you need to stop and observe your mind in action.

IDENTIFY EPISODES OF INACTIVITY!

When you are not acting according to your values and goals and not fighting for what you want, you create an empty space in your mind. Thus, the mind will do everything possible to fill this empty space, mostly with criticism, negative thoughts, and barriers. Inactivity contributes to increasing the frequency of fears and worries.

So, there are two ways to act in this case. You can let yourself be captured by the turmoil of emotions and not take any action, remain inactive. Or, another solution that we warmly recommend is to accept these states, emotions, thoughts, memories related to discrimination, and continue on your way to fulfilling your values. When you choose the option to fill the empty space with vitality, the negative remnants in your mind will gradually disappear and make room for new, good, and positive things.

FLEX YOUR FLEXIBILITY!

Every time you try to do something new, different, or outside your comfort zone, you exercise your flexibility. You expand your knowledge, become more open to opportunities, and more adaptable.

There are various ways to help you exercise flexibility:

✓**Novelty**: When you feel stuck in a routine, try something new. A client felt this blockage in his life. Every time he went out to the city, he frequented the same two or three places that he thought were LGBT-friendly. One day he decided to try other places and since then he has discovered new preferences when it comes to restaurants and bars (which could be visited despite the pandemic). Feed your mind with positive news and experiences: If

you are the type of person who is informed and up to date with the latest news from the internet, media, or other sources of information, we suggest you take a short break. Give yourself a period away from the negative noise of the world, from discriminatory messages that appear everywhere on social media, or even in LGBT+ groups. Turn off the TV and mobile phone and do something else. Fill this break with music, art, literature, or nature.

✓Develop a playful spirit along with your mind, body, and life. Children are true masters in the art of play. As adults, we seem to have lost this ability. Studies have shown that people who integrate play into their relationships with others are happier and even healthier, as they have filled the state of inactivity with activity, actions, and interactions.

FORWARD OR BACKWARD?

Every time you face obstacles and are unsure whether your planned actions will help you or not, ask yourself: "Does my response to this event, thought, feeling, or physiological sensation bring me closer or take me further away from the life I aspire to live?"

Here are some other question variations you can use:

- If this thought (emotion, memory, or physiological sensation) could offer me advice, would it be one that helps me on my journey as an LGBT+ person or holds me back?
- What advice could my values offer me? (Remember an essential value for you.)
- What advice would I give to a child or someone in the same situation?
- In what direction have my steps led me so far?
- What does my experience say about the solution found? But, above all, in whom do I have the most confidence? My mind and feelings or my acquired experience?

These questions help you in times of need when you feel threatened or confused, and the answers will remind you that past solutions have not yielded significant results. Therefore, you could do things differently.

LEARN FROM EMOTIONAL DISCOMFORT!

Fear, anxiety, and other emotional barriers that cause pain are not your enemies, but teachers. If you had not experienced disappointment, you would not have learned how to shape your expectations in the future. Without the frustration and pain caused by the discriminatory behavior of others, you would not have appreciated the kindness and compassion of the LGBT+ community or other LGBT+ friendly individuals. If you had not experienced the fear of being considered abnormal, you would not have known what courage and pride it takes to be LGBT+. Moments of pain offer you the chance to grow and change. They teach you new skills and give you a new perspective on life.

We suggest that for every painful experience you face as an LGBT+ person, you use your observer skills to see all things (including the negative) with compassion. You could choose to be open to the entire range of LGBT+ experiences (positive and negative) and experience them with compassion and, if necessary, with forgiveness. How do you think this could help you? It is possible that emotional pain will no longer fuel minority stress and anxiety while you are busy taking positive action when the conditions are right for true happiness.

**Once we are truly committed to change, life begins to change
provide answers. Commitment leads to action. And actions
turn dreams into reality.**

MODULE 6 - LOOK AT YOUR LIFE WITH COMPASSION (The Self Viewed as The Context)

"Although we all carry the seed of fear in our being, we must learn not to nurture it and instead to nurture our positive qualities of compassion, understanding, kindness and love."
(Thich Nhat Hanh)

Objectives of this module:

- To practice acceptance of your own feelings and thoughts;
- To learn how to live with your thoughts and emotions;
- To relate to the anxiety and stress with compassion and kindness;
- To practice forgiveness.

In the previous modules, you saw that anxiety and stress are emotions that you experience periodically. They may burst into consciousness, but after a while, they disappear. You, the person living and observing your own life, are separate from the emotions of anxiety and fear. Like every thought or emotion, anxiety has its own moment on stage, then it goes away. The only constant is you, the audience, the observer of your own life. We remind you that assuming the pose of an impartial observer is the best way to act in situations of emotional crisis, as you will not be put in the position of choosing a side, good or bad, and the battle with your own judgment will end.

You have also noticed that in order to live the life you want, a meaningful life, it is important to make peace with your own past. Do not chase away the painful moments related to your sexual identity, accept them with an open heart and tenderness, so that you won't be caught in the trap of the past.

STRESS AND SELF COMPASSION

If you remember, at the beginning of this program we talked about the fact that in addition to the usual sources of stress, the LGBTQ+ community is subject to additional sources of pressure, that we called minority stress. Unfortunately, these sources of stress can have a negative impact on your mental health, affecting your functioning and well-being. In fact, states of anxiety or discouragement are a normal reaction when the person is subjected to additional psychological pressures, resulting from the mismatch of values and self-identity with heterosexual values and identity. In fact, the pressure exerted on the minority comes through explicit or implicit messages, that LGBTQ+ people are inferior, strange, deficient or at least exotic and flamboyant. And as mentioned, some members of the LGBTQ+ community may unwittingly internalize these messages (remember the concept of internalized homophobia). Although these messages are in reality incorrect and intended to harm the community, they can enter the person's habitual way of thinking and contribute to the formation of an unrealistic and deficient self-image throughout life. In fact, a negative self-image contributes to symptoms of anxiety and depression. On the other hand, it is possible that a gay person, following the socialization done in the community, to expect to like or to do certain things, to be good at certain things, and then to feel discouraged or disappointed, when he finds out that he is not as he had originally thought.

Precisely for this reason, during this program we have proposed a series of strategies to relate differently to your thoughts and emotions. We have already encouraged you to accept your thoughts as just thoughts and emotions as just emotions, to detach from them by looking at them from the outside, to cultivate your ability to be connected to the present moment, to clarify your values and to act accordingly to them. We will conclude our approach with one last invitation: to look at your life with compassion, to consider the fact that you are much more than your sexual identity, to treat yourself with gentleness and understanding. We've left this last strategy for last, in the hope that it can crown the whole effort so far, rounding out your repertoire of healthy stress and anxiety management skills.

ACT RESPONSIBLY ON YOUR NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

In order to open up and move beyond the limits of anxiety and fear, you must cultivate the necessary conditions for an increased freedom. As we saw in the quote at the beginning of the module, you should nurture a new relationship with your mind and your emotions. This new relationship is one in which you decide to stop nurturing stress and negative emotions. Instead, you greet them with compassion and love. You can simply think that you are a worthy person, that your sexual orientation is just a part of your life. Being gentle with yourself is one of the most powerful antidotes to anxiety, fear and other forms of emotional pain.

This mission is not easy and requires a continuous change of perspective. Let go of the myth that your anxiety, stress and worries are the enemy: the one that must be defeated. You can read again the myths of anxiety from the first module. You have learned by now that this struggle is costing you too much. You also know that you are invincible because you can never win a battle with yourself, as you have observed in the previous module.

An important question comes into play at this point: "Do anxiety and stress need to be your enemies? What if you approached anxiety with compassion and kindness instead of declaring war on it?" This is a good exercise, which, over time, would make your worries and fears diminish. You would notice that accepting them, leads to a more fulfilling life. Compassion and kindness can heal you of anxiety, fear and worry. These will transform the blockages that anxiety and worry cause, into something you can live with. To develop compassion, you must cultivate the capacity for love and kindness, like that of a mother for her child. Like a muscle, it's a skill that develops as you practice it.

What if anxiety and stress didn't look like threatening legacies? What if it looked more like a child, your child? Perhaps you could treat this child as you would treat your child if he or she was unruly? Think about how you would react.

Some parents react to children's unbridled energy with yelling and beating. Some children endure this treatment by receiving punishments one after another. Other children are rebels and find ways to respond and fight against their parents. Scientific studies have shown that these parenting strategies are an ineffective way of managing children's behaviors. Parents end up feeling tired, frustrated, while children continue to be children, but with tired and frustrated parents. Worse, children will grow up learning to be hard and demanding on themselves and others.

Other parents have a more delicate, but still firm approach. They do not resort to punishment when the child misbehaves. They move beyond the first impulse to react negatively and channel their energy into gentle methods with long-term beneficial effects. They see their child as a part of them. They want their child to know kindness and love, and they teach him what they are by personal example. They act like real leaders and bring the child in the direction in which they, the parents, want to go, for their own good and that of their child. Research shows that this method of relating is the most successful as a strategy for educating children.

What is your strategy when it comes to managing anxiety and stress? Do you end up yelling or raising your voice? If you usually do this, does it work? Does the anxiety subside or does it continue to upset you and cause you problems? Maybe it's time to redirect your energy in a different way. After all, your anxieties and worries are a part of you, like a child. How about treating them with kindness and compassion, but still being firm?

PRACTICE ACTS OF KINDNESS AND LOVE

From our practice, we have learned that stressed people and those with anxiety problems are very demanding of themselves. They often become frustrated that their lives have become limited and are increasingly caught up in a blame or prevention game. Some people become very concerned with managing their sexual orientation, plan everything,

try to be very preventive, they think about who might see them, they worry about where and with whom they go, what they say, what they post on social networks, etc.

For example, some people who have been abused or subjected to obviously discriminatory treatment may have frequent feelings of anger. They are angry at those responsible for the trauma experienced in the past. They also blame themselves for the fact that they can't or couldn't cope better with the situation or sink into shame, remorse and regret that they didn't act differently, during the time they were abused and discriminated.

Unfortunately, these emotions of guilt and hatred do not solve the problem. You probably know this from your experiences so far. It is time for you, perhaps for the first time, to decide to change the way you relate to yourself, your mind and your experiences. Instead of blaming and hating, choose to take care of your inner home, meaning your mind, body and emotions.

You have two options. You can create a hostile and unfriendly place or one full of kindness and compassion. The most important step starts with you. Learn to be gentler, first with yourself and then with the others, if you want to stop being in a prolonged war with fear, worry, anxiety and with your life in general.

By practicing acts of kindness to yourself and others, you will create an antidote to anxiety, anger, shame, regret and depression. It's a simple thing you can do to bring peace and joy into your life.

HOW TO BE BETTER WITH YOUR OWN PERSON

You want to be better with yourself, but maybe you don't know how to start. Here's what you can do: make a pact to commit on doing an act of kindness for yourself every day. These acts are important for what we call TSL problems: problems that occur when you feel Tired, Stressed and Lonely. These TSL problems can be cut from the root, if you remember daily to meet them with kindness and compassion. Kindness and compassion

are not emotions. There are ways of acting. To act with compassion towards oneself and towards the others is to act with love. This may mean investing time to meditate, read a book, go for a walk, listen to music or cook. Look in the mirror and say what you appreciate about yourself, take yourself out at a meal in the city, take a hot bubble bath, take a few steps back when an environment becomes too toxic, etc.

Cherishing life and being good are related. Everytime you can do something that is in the spirit of your values, you are becoming a better person.

TRANSFORM YOUR MIND AND BODY INTO A PLACE OF KINDNESS

Remember the chessboard exercise from module 3. Through that exercise you learned that you can be a player with a stake in each battle or you can be the board on which the game is played. In the following exercise, "Love-Kindness Meditation" we invite you to practice the transformation of the "chess board" into a friendly and forgiving space.

The "Love-Kindness" meditation is about gentleness and finesse. It is about the tenderness with which you would treat a newborn or the care with which you would touch a fragile thing. In those moments, you handle what is given to you with the utmost care. You can do the same with your anxious thoughts, worries, fears and painful memories. There is much strength and power in kindness.

Kindness begets kindness. Many people discover their capacity for love and that it increases as they practice meditation, thinking about other people, people they respect or like or don't know at all. You can do the same as you develop this skill. I am running a few minutes late; my previous meeting is running over.

Exercise 6.1. LOVE-KINDNESS MEDITATION

Start by getting comfortable in your relaxation space. Sit straight, with your feet on the floor, your legs and hands free and your palms facing up or down on your feet. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing.

Continue to focus on each inhalation and exhalation, noticing the rhythm of the movement of your chest. After you have managed to relax and focus, imagine an aura of goodness covering you. Start from the head and continue slowly towards the chest, abdomen, legs. While this aura covers you, with each breath you can repeat in your mind: I am here, present, aware, alert, open, benevolent, gentle, calm, strong.

When you have arrived with the aura at the soles of your feet, try to remember someone you know, who is suffering or has suffered. It could be someone from the LGBTQ+ community or a parent, sister or brother, a friend or colleague. It could be a child, an older person or someone you heard about on TV. Try to imagine that that person is present in the room with you now, suffering. Now, look into your heart and try to find the power to heal. Imagine that you can heal the person you are thinking about: restore that person's mind, body, failures, pain, trials or wholeness. Visualize with your mind's eye how you offer the person kindness and healing, then reach out your hands and offer them a gift hidden in your palms: that peace and kindness that they need so much.

In your mind's eye, visualize yourself wiping away her/his tears. Reach out and wrap the person in a hug, with your heart. Give yourself the opportunity to connect with that person through kindness, so that she/he is no longer alone. You are not alone. Be your own act of generosity and share your capacity for soul healing.

Continue to sit quietly in this moment and when you are ready, gradually turn your attention to the sounds around you. Open your eyes with the intention of extending kindness and love to yourself and others, every moment of this day.

Write down some impressions about the experience of this exercise.

PRACTICE KINDNESS WITH YOUR OWN WOUNDS

Being gentle includes accepting your own emotions and feelings, memories and hurts, including those related to the winding road, you've walked so far as an LGBTQ+ person. Many of us have deep wounds, arising from the assumption of sexual identity, the loss of a loved one, or sometimes resulting from discrimination or abuse. When those emotions and feelings arise, the first instinct is to reject them. If you do that, stop it! Why do you do this? People who have been injured continue to cause suffering to themselves and the people around them, because they fail to heal their wounds. If you do not heal your wounds, you will later pass them on to other people, your life partner, friends, colleagues, etc. For a moment, think about what you would do, if you had a physical problem, for example a stomach problem, back or teeth. In these situations it is recommended to stop and try to treat the respective problem. We suggest you do the same with your soul wounds, with all those emotions of stress, fear, worry or shame.

To get rid of anxiety, you need to start taking care of yourself. You can start by being kind and gentle with yourself and facing anxiety with compassion. You don't have to rely on other people to do this for you.

OFFER KINDNESS TO YOURSELF AND TO THE OTHERS

Like in the „Chinese Trap” exercise, now is the time to be open to what might happen. Here's what you can do: close your eyes, touch your forehead or chest and remember the moments when a loved one's hand touched you when you were in moments of suffering. The goodness and love of that loved one is alive in your hands and you can enjoy that goodness now or whenever and wherever you want.

The best time to practice giving kindness is when you are walking. Sharon Salzberg, a well-known teacher in the art of cultivating passion and kindness, teaches us that an exercise becomes effective when it is practiced regularly, as part of a daily routine.

BY LEARNING TO FORGIVE YOU ALLOW THE PAIN TO PASS

When people hear the word forgiveness, they immediately jump to conclusions. Your mind may tell you that forgiveness involves acceptance or moving over past wrongs, or worse, ignoring the pain you've had. Completely untrue!

By learning to forgive, you will find a way to deal with the past pain. Studies show that the ability to forgive can be learned and leads to improved health: physical, emotional and spiritual. In addition to these benefits, leaving pain aside, you can move on with your life. You can decide how you want to move forward, to create the life you want right now.

To learn to detach from reliving past negative emotions and practice forgiveness, we suggest an exercise to become aware of the pain (without judging or denying it), to separate things (using the observing self), to be a compassionate witness (to relate with compassion to your own experience, but also to the experience of others), to detach and move on (giving up reliving negative emotions and moving on in the direction you really want to go).

EXERCISE 6.2. FREE YOUR MIND OF RANCOUR!

Take a moment to remember a situation from your past, about which you still have emotions of anger, pain, bitterness, frustration. It may be a situation where you have been abused or discriminated against, because of your sexual orientation. In the space below, write down this situation in as much details as possible.

Close your eyes and try to observe the situation. What happened? Who was wrong? How were you injured? Were others injured? Allow yourself to see these things, to feel them. Be aware of the thoughts and emotions you have in this moment. Which are these?

Notice how your mind makes the connection between judgments, blame and negative evaluations. Try to be a simple silent observer and separate your thoughts and judgments from the pain you are feeling right now. Strive to see the judgments, the culpa, the bitterness exactly as they are, without mixing them up, without judging them. Just view them!

Now, try to review the situation, as if you were at the cinema and on a huge screen you were watching a drama. Without getting involved in any way, try to observe - with compassion for the actors - who is hurt, who is hurting, who is responsible. After viewing the video, please ask yourself: Who is in control of the deployment? Who is responsible for this deployment to take place? Who is in control of reliving the emotions you are currently feeling? Who is hurt in the present because of the memory of past wrongs or injustices? Who has the strength to detach and move on?

The answer to the above questions is "**Me**". You can detach your desire and hope for solving these situations. You can use otherwise, the energy you waste trying to resolve them and you can address these past events in a much more constructive way. Gently try to see the pain for what it is, because it is yours, and choose to detach from it, to release it.

If you want to free yourself from reliving negative emotions, do it. If it is difficult for you to do this, think about the costs you incur, by keeping these situations and the emotions they arouse, alive in your mind. Imagine what you would do with the free mental time. What would you do with it? How would you like to use it?

BE KIND TO THE OTHERS

More than being kinder and gentler to yourself, try to be kinder, to behave with compassion towards the others as well. You can say "Thank you", "Please...", "With pleasure" more often. You can smile to a stranger, open a door for someone or yield to someone in the traffic. Live anchored in the present. Be mindful. Hug someone you love.

Try to be understanding, forgive yourself, be compassionate when you are hurt and feel the need to take revenge.

The purpose of these activities done out of kindness is to do something out of love and for yourself. Thus, you express one of your personal values, that of being kind. You don't need to feel reconciled or loving, before you decide to act with kindness and love. You can do this regardless of how you feel.

Look for the moments when you can share, when you can offer warmth, a helping hand. Do this especially when you are sad, nervous or agitated. You will benefit greatly from these acts of love and compassion.

Over time, acts of kindness will become automatic, bringing with them more meaning to your life. You may see how your level of happiness increases or how your social relationships improve. Be mindful though! You won't always get the favor returned.

To make it easier for you to do such acts of kindness or gentleness, we propose an exercise to plan such an act.

EXERCISE 6.3. PLANNING THE ACTS OF KINDNESS

Think of an act of kindness you could do this week. Think of a person and a thing that you could do quite easily (an act that would not involve a large cost - of time, money or energy - to you). Consider, if it is an act for a person, that the person may not be available at any time. Then, write down the planning of this act.

1. Act of Kindness / Helping

Briefly describe an act of kindness that you plan to do this week.

2. Recipient – who is the concerned subject? Write the recipient's name.

<i>3. Time and place - when and where? Describe the time and the situation/context in which you plan to be kind or helpful to the person mentioned at point 2.</i>
<i>4. Motivation - why do you want to be good to this person? Describe why you want to do this act of kindness.</i>
<i>5. Mode of action - how will you show your kindness? Describe how will you act, what will you do, how exactly will you help the person concerned.</i>
<i>6. Frequency - how often do you want to be generous? Mention, if applicable, the extent to which you could help this person repeatedly.</i>

In conclusion, it is essential to realize that being kind and loving is something you can choose to be. Develop your skills to be kind, because it can become your way of being and living your life.

AT THE END OF THE PACT PROGRAM

1. LIVE ACCORDING TO YOUR OWN VALUES!

When you started this program, you may have thought that you would learn how to ignore stress, fear and anxiety, in order to achieve happiness and feel better. Hopefully by now, you've realized that this is not the path to happiness and it is in fact, a recipe for disaster.

Since you have reached this point, we would like to congratulate you, because you have accomplished a lot for your inner peace. But to maintain this state, you must always be prepared for the reappearance of old sources of stress and emotional barriers. Maybe they will try again to prevent you from achieving the things you want and will come to meet you with fresh forces. In order not to be overwhelmed by the whirlwind of emotions, in the end, we will resume some of the most important strategies that you could use to overcome some barriers that can appear at any moment in life.

2. KEEP GOING!

There will be new obstacles in your way every time. Old emotional barriers can return. There will be times when you will not be able to act to achieve the proposed goals. There is a possibility of falling prey to old emotional habits. There will also be days when achieving your goals will take longer than you expected. And that's okay.

Everyone will act in their own pace.

3. PRACTICE YOUR GAINED SKILLS!

With practice, these skills will develop and you will be able to use them easier. One reason people return to old habits, that bring unhappiness is because they are giving up on the exercises, that helped them on their way to create a mature and healthy sexual identity. So it is important to do one or even two exercises daily, in a quiet place. Seek to actively use the new skills learned, in your everyday life.

4. DON'T BE DISCOURAGED!

There will be times, when you will make a commitment according to your own values and for various reasons, you will not be able to keep your word. New barriers will appear, that will have a surprising effect and the people around you, will not give you any encouragements. They might even say: "you won't succeed", "you will be hurt", "you are a gay/a lesbian", "you will be laughed at".

It is difficult to stay true to your commitment, when negative emotions are overwhelming you. That's why, it's important to remember that when you get off track, you can always come back to your commitment and act in the spirit of your values and goals. Expect barriers, uncertainty, doubt and the fact that your mind will not always offer you advice worth following. In fact, the mind will sum up all the fears and worries, trying to put obstacles in your way. In these moments, you might ask yourself: "Am I willing to commit 100% to this activity; is it in accordance with my values?"

Knowing that you will experience discomfort and doubt, are you still willing to commit yourself fully to these activities? Remember that commitment is not something you can give up halfway through.

5. FACE DIFFICULTIES GRACEFULLY!

Life will constantly ask you if you are willing to face internal and external difficulties, all in order to live a free and meaningful life. You have already formed an idea of what it means to have goodwill in action. We are not talking about the absence of fear here, but rather the decision that your goals are more important than your fears. That's why, it takes courage to have goodwill! You have decided to take a step, one with open arms. You will never be sure what you will find when you take this step, but you can be sure that it will bring you closer to happiness.

You have now a new perspective on life and a set of skills that enable you on your journey to maturity and fulfillment. You don't have to become someone else or change your personal history to create the life you want.

6. STEP BY STEP TOWARDS THE LIFE YOU WANT!

Begin each day with this commitment: Today I will try my best to act with gentleness and courage. Try to act in such a way, that at the end of the day, you will be proud of what you have achieved. And even if it happens that you do not achieve everything you set out to do, and you notice that you have returned to your old habits, be lenient with yourself. Look for the beautiful things in that day and appreciate them.

Compassion, gentleness, flexibility and courage are powerful antidotes to suffering. Recognize that you are human and that you are allowed to make mistakes.
Take your time!

It is indeed risky to make changes, but life is about change and the LGBTQ+ community is full of life changes. There is a possibility that things won't go as planned and yet, the biggest risk in life is not to take risks. Few things are certain in life. If you choose to play on safe ground, your life will not change. And if nothing changes, you will end up back where you started, in a place full of suffering.

7. ANSWER THE LIFE QUESTIONS!

This is probably the single and most important question that life will ask when you encounter difficulties. In those moments, stop, take a deep breath and ask yourself this question: „Am I willing to accept everything I receive from life and at the same time, realize what is important for me?“

"Yes" is the only answer that will direct you to a meaningful life that aligns with your values. "No" means only one thing: You are still not okay with changes. Every time you find yourself in this negative answer, remind yourself that you can always change your answer, reorient your steps and take the risk to have a fulfilling life, as an LGBTQ+ person.

Although fear, worry, stress and anxiety may seem like monsters, they are actually more like scared children. Like most children, they respond best to gentleness, compassion and kindness. Be forgiving and gentle with yourself and others and life will acquire new meanings!

**"Where you end up is not the most important thing.
But the road you will travel to get there! You
will call that road LIFE."**

(Tim Wile)

